

**Chaucer's Models of Dreaming:**  
Definitions, Sources, and Meaning

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Cardiff University  
PhD Thesis

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**Summary of Thesis:**

This thesis is a study of the oneiric imagery in Chaucer's works. Unlike other studies it concentrates on 'dream' as conveying the wider significance of a transitional state of consciousness other than ordinary awareness. It aims particularly to investigate the significance of Middle English 'drem'. By showing that further to the physiological 'dream', 'drem' encompassed a number of transitional ecstatic states of consciousness, the thesis intends to explore and re-assess the boundaries within which 'drem' was employed. It also investigates to what extent the intertext of mystics' writing could influence Chaucer's works, given that symbolic oneiric images common in mystics' writings are embedded in Chaucer's narrative.

It argues that Chaucer's oneiric imagery conveys the significance of the poet's nearly-ecstatic transitional state in which the poet creates the world of poetry. The oneiric ecstatic framework impacts on the structure of his works: dream visions and later works are characterised by a ladder-like ascending structure parallel to the mystical ascending journey of the soul to God. Oneiric imagery epitomising mystical writing underpins Chaucer's works, conserves similar significance, and signposts crucial episodes within the dreamer's progress into the thick of the narration.

The thesis is structured in two parts. After outlining the dream classifications from Macrobius onwards, the first part explores how the employment of 'drem' overarches transitional states of consciousness, including visions and ecstatic revelations. It then investigates the stages towards contemplation, and foregrounds crucial symbolic images signalling the ascent to ecstatic contemplative states, as witnessed by Middle English mystics. The second part focuses on Chaucer's works and emphasises the presence both of the oneiric mystical ascending ladder-like structure, and of fundamental mystical symbols appearing at crucial stages within the literary works. It concentrates on Chaucer's dream visions, subsequently it investigates how Troilus's plight parallels the mystics' progress towards contemplation, and finally suggests how Chaucer's oneiric poetic, germinating with the dream visions, blossoms in his later works.



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## Abbreviations

<i>BD</i>	<i>The Book of the Duchess</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>Canterbury Tales</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>HF</i>	<i>The House of Fame</i>
<i>LGW</i>	<i>The Legend of Good Women</i>
<i>MED</i>	<i>Medieval English Dictionary</i> < <a href="http://quod.lib.umich.edu">http://quod.lib.umich.edu</a> >
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLQ</i>	<i>Modern Language Quarterly</i>
<i>NPT</i>	<i>The Nun's Priest's Tale</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>PF</i>	<i>The Parliament of Fowls</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , J.-P. Migne ed.
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>RR</i>	<i>The Romance of the Rose</i>
<i>TC</i>	<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>
<i>YES</i>	<i>Yearbook of English Studies</i>

## General Introduction

Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge  
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho  
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge  
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,  
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;  
Ek for to wynnyn love in sondry ages,  
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages. (TC, II, ll. 22-28)<sup>1</sup>

Poets are aware that words – the implements for their literary creations – modify their significance in the course of time. This is valid for the term ‘dream’ in medieval dream visions. In modern English the term ‘dream’ has no synonyms. In Middle English ‘drem’ was accompanied by numerous terms including *vision*, *oracle*, *phantom*, *revelation*, *sweven* and the verbs *dremen*, *sweven* and *meten*, evidence that one word would not define exhaustively a phenomenon as multifaceted as medieval oneiric activity. When the oneiric events of medieval dream visions are discussed, they have been mostly considered according to the modern significance of physiological ‘dreams’ occurring during sleep, or as a metaphor for poetry. Although this meaning is recorded in Middle English, it is still worth asking what significance Middle English ‘drem’ conveyed at the time. C. S. Lewis maintained that when terms are defined, it is because ‘we are in some measure departing from their real current sense’. However, he also cautioned against the ‘dangerous sense’ of a word that is applied to a term of the past, where by ‘dangerous sense’ is meant the preconceived undiscussed modern significance.<sup>2</sup> This study aims to contribute to the differentiation between the possible ‘dangerous sense’ and the significance ‘drem’ could have conveyed at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, L. D. Benson ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, third ed., 1988

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967, pp. 12 ff. and p. 18.



From Antiquity to the Middle Ages it was believed that during sleep the soul was free from the ties with the physical body. Dreams occurred when the soul detached itself from these ties, not in the final moment of transition from life to death, but rather when in sleep or in ecstasy. For this reason dreams could lead to higher knowledge. The soul, free from the body as well as from reason, might lead to the prophetic *furor*. The Middle Ages accepted the inheritance of classical Antiquity and developed theories, the purpose of which was to systematise dreams and label them in order to discern true from meaningless dreams. However, more than that, dreams were believed to have a profound meaning that had to be extracted and interpreted from the sometimes obscure images. Dreams were included in classifications identifying the ways through which true knowledge could be achieved. These classifications ranged from knowledge acquired through the senses to ecstatic revelatory phenomena by which mystics and saints attained spiritual truths. For some medieval philosophers, ecstasy, an oneiric category in itself, was the highest stage on the ladder towards knowledge, as it was yielded by God.

In medieval texts there are frequent occurrences of a character passing from the ordinary state of being to another, be it anger, fury, 'stupor', astonishment, or fainting. A series of expressions also describe a change in consciousness: in a frenzy, in a trance, in a study, ravished, inebriated, stupefied, out of one's wits. A lover may be in a state of anger, of astonishment, or at times even lose consciousness and faint; but then on seeing his beloved he can suddenly rejoice. These transitions are sudden and temporary, from which the character can easily 'come back' to the ordinary state. As a result of centuries of rationalisation, other states of being are now differentiated on the basis of scientifically objective criteria. Anger, wrath or fury fall into the

sphere of moods; madness has taken an avenue of its own; fainting and losing consciousness tend not to be juxtaposed with dreams. Why, then, gather these transitional states together?

Lors comanceras a plorer  
Et diras: “Dex! Qu’ai ge songié?  
Qu’est or ce? Ou estoie gié?” (*Roman de la Rose*, ll. 2436-8)<sup>3</sup>

Where had he been? the central character in the *Romance of the Rose* asks himself and the readers. The *Romance of the Rose*, the model for the poets of dream visions, commences with a dream. This study aims to investigate Chaucer’s ‘drem’ as a transitional state of consciousness, belonging to the same category as ecstatic contemplation. From the reading of medieval literary texts, it becomes evident that these states were considered as if belonging to another state of consciousness, very close to the supernatural. ‘Drem’ includes a number of transitional states often mentioned in visionary literature. Medieval ‘drem’ is a general term; not only the progenitor of modern ‘dream’, it includes a number of states of consciousness different from ordinary awareness. Mystics compare their experiences to the closest phenomena common people can identify with: dreams. Their ecstasies are ‘like dreams’. And in their dream-like states they see visions, and attain ecstatic contemplation of the divine.

Dreams and oneiric ecstatic phenomena are transitional, and the mystics’ writings are texts rich in resources from linguistic, figurative, and theoretical perspectives. They enable the reader to investigate the ascending process towards contemplation as it is witnessed in first person. Further, the use of vernacular enables one to parallel the

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<sup>3</sup> [Then you will start crying and say: ‘God! What have I dreamt? What is this? Where was I?']  
Translations throughout the thesis are mine, unless otherwise stated.

mystical experience as expressed by the Middle English mystics and the oneiric literary experience. Chaucer always introduces his dream visions with an explicit dream. His dreams, which are turned into poetry, are claimed to be wonderful, so marvellous that they are inaccessible to interpretations even of the most brilliant dream interpreters of the past. The oneiric outset of Chaucer's dream visions leads to the common root of dreams, to poetic and religious inspiration that in many cultures are closely linked. The fictional hero can travel and have access to the other world while still alive. However, he is not alone. The mystics and the poets can access this too.

Acknowledging the relevance of the 'drem' leads to the identification of an implicit *topos* shared by medieval poets who adopt the 'drem' frame to locate the poet's function within the debate on poetry and theology: an assertion of the sacred role of the poet as the person within society who is close to the mystery of the ecstatic contemplation of the divine. This concept is common to the ancient traditions wherein the poet, the priest, and the seer were functions embodied by one member of society. By the medieval period these functions had become specialised and were allocated to differentiated contexts: the clergy, artists, and the mystics as seers/prophets. The function and consequently the content of poetry have also changed in the course of centuries: poetry has become an art based on aesthetic laws with the aim to entertain and to teach, whereas contemplation pertains to theologians, mystics and prophets. Nonetheless the power of creative abstraction and of figurative flight is left to the poets who can apply it in the intimate space of their bedchambers where they can see their 'drems'.

In this wider context, this study aims to explore the models that could have inspired Chaucer's oneiric poetry, how 'drem' can be defined, and what significance it conveys. The method followed here is illustrated by the structure of the thesis itself. 'Drem' has been investigated in fields other than poetry, including philosophy and mysticism. Stepping beyond the literary field enables one to contextualise the use of 'drem' more widely and to attain a more complete understanding of its significance. Moreover the overview concerning the mystical event has provided the opportunity to look – albeit briefly – at other cultures. An anthropological perspective is fruitful and has permitted the identification of crucial elements present diachronically and cross-culturally in the discourse of the oneiric phenomena and contemplation. As a consequence the significance of 'drem' has become richer. It refers to a temporary state of more acute awareness during which the 'dreamer' can attain some knowledge. When the poets-dreamers transit into this temporary, more acute state of consciousness, they attain knowledge, inspiration. The oneiric imagery has been acknowledged as a metaphor for the poet's composition by criticism. Further on from that, it signposts the poet's wider awareness attainable only by seers and mystics, and by the hero who travels into the netherworld and returns.

In order to avoid confusion in meaning, a distinction has been posited between 'drem' and 'dream', although this is not a subdivision existing in the medieval use. It has appeared a convenient strategy to convey the larger significance that Middle English 'drem' had, compared to Modern English 'dream'. Modern English 'dream' has been employed when referring to the physiological phenomenon, whereas the Middle English 'drem' has been maintained when referring to the literary event of the poet's dream visions. Similarly the Middle English or the Latin forms have been

employed to differentiate the modern meaning from the medieval one (for instance *ymaginacioun*, *cogitatio*, *stody*, in the place of ‘imagination’, ‘thinking’, and ‘study’).

The thesis is structured in two parts: the first illustrates the cultural context in which literary dream visions were composed. Although a specialised analysis of a phenomenon has the advantage of magnifying its component aspects, it is enlightening to focus also on the larger cultural discourse wherein dream visions were integral. The first part outlines the oneirocritical tradition from Classical Antiquity and relates the main dream classifications that in the course of time have been assimilated within Christianity. Devoted to the dreams in philosophical discourse, it explores the connection between true knowledge and ecstatic states yielded by the divinity. The Church was aware of the possible threats stemming from direct communication with the divinity. Nonetheless *contemplatio* and ecstasy were not downgraded in the classifications of states. The chapter on Mysticism originates from the previous, in that mystics are the ones who personally experience *contemplatio*, and relate the visions bestowed in their transitional states. The choice of analysing the English mystics enables the investigation of the degrees of the mystical experience as expressed in Middle English, as this context would influence the fourteenth-century poets. As Chaucer initiated English poetry in Middle English, Rolle was the mystic who disseminated his teaching in Middle English.

As literary criticism on Chaucer’s dream visions has focussed on dream as a physiological phenomenon, it has overlooked the revelatory aspect of dream within ecstatic, visionary phenomena. When criticism also takes into consideration writings by philosophers and theologians, only dreams are analysed, leaving aside similar oneiric phenomena, such as *visio*, as if these do not pertain to the same area of

investigation. This thesis looks at the oneiric phenomenon within both dream classifications (as traditional and authoritative as those established by Macrobius and Gregory the Great for instance) and at 'drem' as one of the transitional states of consciousness leading to revelatory ecstasy and closely associated to true knowledge.

The research argues that in Chaucer's works the Middle English 'drem' conveys a significance more extensive than in modern usage. Beyond 'dream', 'drem' encapsulates concepts related to ecstatic, revelatory phenomena that the Middle Ages inherit from pre-Christian philosophy and the patristic tradition. In order to illustrate this ampler significance, provinces beyond literature within the cultural context, in which 'drem' is employed, need to be explored. That is the reason why the present study commences by exploring the oneiric discourse within theology, philosophy, and mysticism, before moving on to examine Chaucer's works.

After reviewing the most authoritative dream classifications from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, the first part identifies the relevant transitional phenomena together with the related terms that express them, in particular those phenomena and terms defining transitional states of consciousness, as well as those images symbolising such states. Philosophers and theologians witness how relevant the oneiric phenomenon is and how it is integral to the attainment of true knowledge. Furthermore, the thesis argues that in addition to the physiological phenomenon that was interpreted according to medieval dream classifications, 'drem' was employed as a figurative image. 'Drem' – and 'drem' within sleep – is employed to indicate an ecstatic state. This is illustrated in the final part of the first chapter which aims to re-discover this other significance of medieval dream that has been overlooked by literary criticism addressing dream visions. The symbolic employment of *somnium* by mystical

theologians demonstrates that there is more to dreams than the physiological experience to be interpreted by applying the oneirocritical tradition that the Middle Ages inherit and assimilate. 'Drem' is employed as a symbol for revelatory ecstasy, which broaches the following investigation of the Middle English mystics.

The mystical experience is analysed as it is narrated by the Middle English mystics. In so doing the transitional phenomenon is identified following the sequential stages as recognized by the mystics. This preliminary part of the research provides 'drem' with an extended scope looking onto other fields of debate within oneiric and ecstatic discourses. In so doing it enables one to identify possible connections and influences within the wider cultural context that could impact on the literature of the time and in particular on Chaucer's poetic creation. In this wider cultural context, the term 'drem' – it is argued – acquires the status of a technical term referring to a transitional state of consciousness that can be experienced during waking and that can refer to an ecstatic, revelatory state common both to mystics and poets. However, while the first part aims to introduce the oneiric phenomena and the related terms that constituted common knowledge within the cultural context in the fourteenth century, it does not intend to provide direct sources, to find analogues, nor finally to suggest that Chaucer's employment of these terms and figurative imagery represents a deliberate borrowing from the specific texts identified and analysed: rather that both the mystics and Chaucer operate within a shared understanding of 'drem'.

By analysing Chaucer's works, the second part of the present research argues that Chaucer's 'drem' can be interpreted as a transitional state leading to a heightened state of consciousness culminating with poetic creation. It illustrates how symbolic

images crucial in the mystical writings also appear in Chaucer's works, and how pivotal their function is within both genres. This part of the research reveals how the 'drem' employed figuratively is appropriated by medieval poets. It is argued that despite the abundance of descriptive details pointing to the specific physicality of the dreamer and of his bedchamber, Chaucer's 'drem' acquires a figurative symbolic significance and points to a higher state of consciousness attained by the poet. This is confirmed by Chaucer's deployment of figurative symbolic imagery with which mystical writings are imbued. This part of the research underscores how such figurative images appear at crucial moments of transition in Chaucer's works and in the Middle English writings, and argues that they mark fundamental moments both within the dreamer's personal development and within the narrative structure as a whole.

In the second part, after the oneiric literary tradition and the influences from the French and Italian poets are briefly outlined, the focus moves on to Chaucer's dream visions, in chapter three. These are not explored as 'dreams' with the aim of finding an interpretation according to medieval dream classifications. The analysis of Chaucer's works proceeds on two levels: firstly considering the 'drem' topos as signposting the transitional state of the poet into the creative state; secondly exploring the similarities between the mystics' progress towards contemplation, and the dreamer's progress within the 'drem'. The study explores how Chaucer inherits the figurative oneiric imagery and appropriates it. The analysis brings to the fore those aspects that mark the passage towards the depth – or the ascent – of the knowledge attained through poetry. Though Chaucer is not a mystic, his works reveal an underlying structure paralleling the mystical progress towards ecstasy and higher knowledge. Far from aiming to demonstrate that Chaucer was a mystic, the



analysis enables the underlying narrative structure to emerge that – whether or not directly (and this is not under discussion here, as it would require a separate analysis of texts) – impacted on Chaucer's work.

The fourth chapter explores how mystical discourse impacts also on works considered secular such as *TC*, where the ascending structure comparable to the mystical ladder towards the apex of narration is still present. The analysis of *TC* occupies a large space, whereas other works with an explicit 'drem' including *LGW* and *NPT* are represented less, as *TC* has turned out to reveal a structure parallel to the mystical progress, including the ascending path towards ecstasy and the descending return to this world. The final chapter illustrates that significantly Chaucer also keeps the oneiric frame in works where there is no explicit 'drem'.

The analysis of Chaucer's works proceeds along two strands. The first is linguistic and illustrates how 'drem' points to a transitional state of the poet in the act of creating poetry. Although dream visions have been examined by criticism, it argues that because the term 'drem' has been considered as 'dream', the oneiric ecstatic aspect of the transitional creative phenomenon has been unexplored. The second strand underpinning the second part of the research considers the impact from the literary point of view of interpreting 'drem' as a transitional ecstatic moment. From this perspective, the literary 'drem' is considered in the development of the structure of the dream visions and of later works including *TC* and the *CT* where the oneiric framework is not explicit.

This perspective considers the 'drem' from the outset in *BD* where the poet sets the foundations of the multilevelled significance of the narrator's 'drem', his sleep, and

his bedchamber. Within this perspective the argument illustrates how *TC* – its narrative structure and its embedded philosophical significance – and Troilus's plight within it are construed paralleling the mystics' progress. In *LGW* and *CT* the poet commences directly in 'drem', and signposts it through elements epitomising dream visions. *CT* conserves the implicit narrative pattern of the *LGW*. The present study also sheds light on narrative structures that are present in the *BD* and that are mirrored and multiplied in *CT*. *BD* presents the Man in Black's tale, the main focus of the poem, as embedded in a multiframe structure, thus it anticipates the multi-layered narrative of *CT*. The Narrator narrates a dream in which the Black Knight in his turn tells his story. Similarly the pilgrim-narrator-dreamer introduces us to a pilgrimage in which multiple characters tell a story. A more detailed analysis of *LGW* and the *NPT* might have followed, but unfortunately the limit of space has prevented this. It has, however, been possible to investigate at large the ladder-like structure underpinning *TC*.

A further study could involve an analysis of the poetic transitional states expressed in medieval poetry mentioned earlier. Together with 'drem', terms such as astonishment, 'stody', and lethargy are very likely to constitute a network of states of consciousness that form a 'grammar' of transitional ecstatic poetic states that deserve attention. The possible further question, then, would deal with the reason why these states are bestowed such dignity in medieval poetry. This would lead one to ask questions concerning the birth of literature as aesthetic entertainment, as we conceive it today, comparing and contrasting it with the realm of oral tradition where the poet was concurrently seer, healer, and priest, when the provinces of lyric creation, mythology, medicine were united and acknowledged the sense of the divine within the Cosmos.

# Chapter 1 – Medieval Dream Classifications

## *Introduction*

Dreams, oneiric phenomena, and other states of consciousness have always fascinated humankind, who have expressed an interest at times divinatory, at others medical, scientific or religious, with the main aim to acquire further knowledge. Visions seen – or voices heard – in these states, experienced beyond ordinary physical human limits, usually hint at a higher reality, residing above ordinary awareness. The existence of a supra-natural level, an extra-ordinary one, is thus established. Dreams have been analysed and classified in hierarchical structures. By means of examples offered in the Scriptures, they rise to a level of authority, as they constitute one of the degrees of knowledge recognised by a number of medieval philosophers and theologians. The hierarchy usually ranges from meaningless dreams to signifying dreams worthy of interpretation, to visions and oracles, up to revelations, prophecy and ecstasy – the latter types being steps towards what medieval theologians consider true knowledge. During the Middle Ages dream interpretation becomes part of scientific, philosophical and theological debate. There is a common ground on which scientists, theologians, and philosophers agree on the classification of dreams.<sup>1</sup>

In this wider perspective dreams are contextualised as sharing a common ground with transitional oneiric phenomena that may otherwise be considered far apart, namely revelations, prophecies and ecstasy. As will be seen, they do share common elements: images seen in dreams, in visions and in ecstatic experiences are similar.

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<sup>1</sup> W. C. Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1960 [1926], pp. 217-8.

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Further, these phenomena occur in a different state of consciousness, which is not neatly definable as sleep or wakefulness. Dreams always occur in sleep, whereas ecstasy can also occur in waking, and revelation and prophecy in both. Ancients already identified phenomena occurring in waking, like Calcidius's *spectaculum*, or the higher degrees of visions listed by Albert the Great. Moreover, these phenomena can occur in states neither completely belonging to sleep nor to waking: firstly the slumber in between the two; secondly illness, including epilepsy and phrenesy. This last case is not considered exclusively by physicians or scientists. Augustine illustrates cases of visions seen during infirmities as well as experiences that fall under the label of journeys into the other world.<sup>2</sup> It appears that dreams and related transitional phenomena can represent experiences occurring in a state of consciousness other than ordinary consciousness.

This overview of dream classifications has two main aims: to analyse dream classifications that the Middle Ages inherited from classical antiquity, and to examine those elaborated in medieval time. The second is to contextualise dreams as belonging to a state of consciousness other than the ordinary one, rather than considering them as phenomena occurring only during sleep. In order to do this it is essential to widen the scope of the analysis by exploring theologians' and philosophers' views upon dreams; and concurrently to consider that in the Middle Ages the dream discourse interweaves with the gnoseologic debate. Dream interpretation, dream-lore, has always been intertwined with oneiromancy, divination by dreams. This attitude does not cease during the Middle Ages despite prohibition

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<sup>2</sup> M. Dulaey, *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de Saint Augustin*, Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 1973, p. 205.

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and attacks from the Church, which started as early as the first centuries of the new era.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the great medieval figures systematise knowledge in fields that today would be inconceivable. It was not uncommon for philosophers and theologians to concern themselves with astrology, mathematics and alchemy contemporarily. To consider the three kinds of dream identified by Curry, *somnium naturale, animale, coeleste*,<sup>4</sup> as part of the human experience as a whole will be revealing, rather than regarding them as three unrelated spheres of human life. Specialisation is a relatively modern concept that does not correspond to the medieval harmonious correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm. The different dreams, *somnium naturale, animale, coeleste*, in which medieval physicians, astrologers and theologians classify the oneiric phenomenon, could be regarded as the rungs of the ladder – to use a mystical image – leading towards the mystical experience, the lower rungs representing the false dreams conveying no significance, whereas the highest lead to ecstasy. In dreams the human soul is potentially able to perform operations extra-ordinary to the human senses: interpreting oneiric signs, foreseeing future events, receiving and understanding divine messages; and in ecstasy ascending to heights where it is possible to be in the presence of the divinity – although it is not possible to see God directly. From this perspective it is possible to consider dreams in the wider context of oneiric phenomena forming the cultural atmosphere that medieval philosophers, mystics, scientists as well as poets and writers breathe.

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<sup>3</sup> See J. Le Goff, 'Les rêves dans la culture et la psychologie collective de l'Occident médiéval', in *Pour un autre Moyen Âge, temps, travail et culture en Occident. 18 essais*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977, p. 304; on the influence of the devil on dreams see Dulaey, pp. 129 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Curry, p. 207.

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This chapter is organised in four main parts. The first two follow the time distinction Le Goff has identified between the early centuries of the new era and a second period beginning with the revolution of the twelfth century.<sup>5</sup> The first covers classifications elaborated until the seventh century of the new era, which are inherited in the coming centuries, including those of Augustine and Gregory the Great. The second is devoted to the revolution of the twelfth century. Amongst the many, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Pascalis Romanus have been chosen to illustrate the influence of Aristotle's works on medieval philosophers. The third part explores the thought of the mystical theologians of St Victor. Works by Hugh and Richard of St Victor shed light on the way dreams intertwine with other states of consciousness, namely *excessus mentis* and ecstasy. Finally a brief overview of the so-called 'tertiary literature',<sup>6</sup> namely the dreambooks, ends the overview.

### ***1. Dream Classifications until the Seventh Century***

#### **Macrobius**

Medieval scholars accepted and developed the classical inheritance of dream-lore. The first main distinction was between 'divine' dreams and those which were not so. Homer speaks of the two doors from which dreams come. Through the door made of horn meaningful dreams pass – those which will come true – through the one made of ivory false dreams are thought to pass.<sup>7</sup> This distinction between dreams that are meaningful and those that are not has contributed to the preservation of the

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<sup>5</sup> Le Goff, 'Les rêves', p. 301.

<sup>6</sup> S. R. Fischer, *The Complete Medieval Dreambook. A Multilingual, Alphabetical Somnia Danielis Collation*, Bern und Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1982, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Odyssey*, XIX, 562-67. The theory of the two gates of dreams – the one made of ivory and the one made of horn – is also present in Virgil's *Aeneid*, VI, ll. 893-898. Macrobius, *Commento al sogno di Scipione*, trans. M. Neri, Milano, Bompiani, 2007, p. 585. Quotations from Macrobius are from this edition.

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dream-lore.<sup>8</sup> Macrobius' classification founded the basis for the medieval theory of dreams. In his commentary, Macrobius (395-423 C.E.) inherits the tradition of classical dream-lore, according to which dreams were a form of divine emanation through which it was possible to foretell the future.

After distinguishing meaningful from meaningless dreams, Macrobius describes five kinds of dreams. For these terms Macrobius employs the Greek terminology and the corresponding Latin: ὄνειρος, corresponds to Latin *somnium*, ὄραμα to *visio*, χρηματισμός to *oraculum*, ἐνύπνιον to *insomnium*, and φάντασμα to *visum*.<sup>9</sup> The last two kinds of dreams are not worth interpreting as they do not lead to divination.<sup>10</sup> *Insomnium* is valid only while the dream lasts, being caused by an anxiety felt during the state of waking. The lover dreams of the beloved, the knight of the enemy in battle; the body is agitated by the abundance or by the lack of food or of wine; finally one can dream of the acquisition or of the loss of external, material fortunes. *Visum* takes place in those moments between waking and deep sleep, when one is just about to surrender to soporific vapours.<sup>11</sup> It is when the person who is sleeping believes s/he is still awake but is already in the presence of 'figures', fantastic images that do not belong to nature. *Επιάλτες*, nightmare, belongs to this category.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E. R. Dodds, quoting Björck in *I Greci e l'irrazionale*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1983, p. 127 n. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Macrobius, Book I, 3.2, p. 246.

<sup>10</sup> Macrobius, Book I, 3.3, p. 246.

<sup>11</sup> The Latin text has 'prima somni nebula'. For possible links to the Cloud of the mystics, see ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to underline that for Macrobius *επιάλτες*, 'epialtes', nightmare, is a subgenre of the *visum*, and that he does not provide a Latin correspondent for this term, as 'nightmare' appears in vernacular in the Middle Ages, see Le Goff, 'Les rêves dans la culture et la psychologie collective de l'Occident médiéval', p. 302 n.16. In recent criticism Latin *insomnium* is rendered with the English 'nightmare'. This translation might lead wrongly to assimilate the category of *insomnium* with the subgenre 'epialtes'. Here 'insomnium' is rendered as 'vain dream'. For instances of translations into 'nightmare', see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 9; A. Peden, 'Macrobius and Mediaeval Dream Literature', *Medium Aevum*, 54 (1985), 59-73, p. 60; A. Minnis, 'Medieval Imagination and Memory', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, vol. ii, pp. 239-274, p. 244; unlike these instances C. S. Lewis distinguishes the two, see *The Discarded Image: an Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964, p. 64.

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The next three kinds of dreams offer means of divination. *Oraculum* occurs when during the sleep a relative or a person of authority such as a priest or the divinity itself appears and declares openly, ‘denuntiat’, what will or will not take place, what the dreamer has to do or to avoid. The dream is defined *visio* when one ‘sees’ exactly what will happen later in reality. Finally *somnium* is the dream that needs interpreting as its meaning is veiled with mysterious images. This is the most common oneiric experience as, Macrobius maintains, everyone has experienced it.<sup>13</sup> The *somnium* is subdivided into five categories: *proprium*, *alienus*, *commune*, *publicum*, *generale*.<sup>14</sup>

Once Macrobius has exhausted this classification, he continues with the analysis of the *Somnium Scipionis*, stating that this dream includes the three kinds of meaningful dreams and the five sub-categories of the *somnium*.<sup>15</sup> In his classification, Macrobius does not include the main distinction identified in the Greek dream-lore: *ὄναρ*, dream which takes place in the night, and *ὕπαρ*, vision that occurs during waking. There are differences between Macrobius and Artemidorus. The Greek author subdivides *ὄνειρος*, *somnium*, into *oraculum* and *visio*.<sup>16</sup> Further, the dream can be ‘theorematic’, when the message is direct and straightforward, or it can be ‘allegorical’ when symbols require interpretation.<sup>17</sup> In Macrobius the theorematic

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<sup>13</sup> On differences between Macrobius’ and Artemidorus’ classification see Macrobius, trans. Neri, p. 584 n. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Macrobius, Book I, 3, 10, p. 250. From the strictly individual dream to the universal one, these five subcategories seem to cover all the possible circumstances that may occur during the dream. The dream is *proprium* when one dreams of doing something; it is *alienum* if one dreams that someone else does something; it is *commune* when one is together with some other person; if one dreams that something happens in the town or in a public place it is *publicum*; and finally if the orbit of the sun or of the moon or the stars or the sky present something new, then it is a *somnium generale*, see Macrobius, Book I, 3, 11, p. 250. In Artemidorus’s classification the dream can be subdivided into the following five categories: personal, impersonal, common, public, and universal, see Artemidorus, *Il libro dei sogni*, trans. D. Del Corno, Milano, Adelphi, 1982, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Macrobius, Book I, 3, 12, p. 250.

<sup>16</sup> Artemidorus, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Artemidorus, p. 6.



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dream corresponds to the *oraculum* (as it speaks ‘aperte’) and to the *visio*; whereas *somnium* corresponds to Artemidorus’ allegorical dream, ὄνειδος.<sup>18</sup>

### Augustine’s Classification of Visions

So many pages have been written on Augustine’s tripartite classification of visions that it seems an arduous task to add something new. However, it is worth highlighting some ideas that will re-emerge in later centuries. In Augustine’s time two dream classifications were popular, the first one of neoplatonic tradition, represented by Macrobius and Calcidius, and the second one by Tertullian, belonging to the Christian tradition.<sup>19</sup> Before moving on to Augustine’s view on dreams and visions, it is appropriate to outline briefly the classifications by Tertullian and Calcidius.

### Tertullian

Dreams originate from divine will or from spirits – either good or evil. In *De anima* Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 230 C.E.) identifies three kinds of dream: those coming from demons, which can be true and favourable, or ‘vain and deceitful’, if caused by evil spirits.<sup>20</sup> The second category is constituted by dreams sent by God, which are ‘honest, holy, prophetic, revelatory, edificatory, and inviting’.<sup>21</sup> The third kind originates in the soul itself.<sup>22</sup> Moreover Tertullian identifies a fourth category, which

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<sup>18</sup> ‘[Q]uod eodem modo’, in exactly the same way, Macrobius, p. 584 n. 40.

<sup>19</sup> Dulaey, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> ‘[V]ana et frustratoria et turbida et ludibriosa et immunda’ [vain and deceitful, obscure, wanton, and impure], Tertullian, *De anima*, ed. J. H. Waszink, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1947, 47, 1, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> ‘[H]onesta sancta prophetica revelatoria aedificatoria vocatoria’, *De anima*, 47, 2, p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Tertia species erunt somnia quae sibimet ipsa anima videtur inducere ex intentione circumstantiarum’ [The third class consists of dreams which seem to be created by the soul itself from intense attention to circumstances], *De anima*, 47, 3, p. 65.

is defined as ecstatic states.<sup>23</sup> Here the close relationship between the oneiric and the ecstatic states is made explicit.

As regards the relation between sleep and other states, Tertullian clarifies that dream is composed of sleep and ecstasy.<sup>24</sup> Sleep gives rest to the body, whereas the soul continues its activity. In Tertullian, ecstasy<sup>25</sup> resembles a 'withdrawing of senses perception and an image of insanity'.<sup>26</sup> As Waszink points out, 'this peculiar form of ecstasy is not a real insanity, but only an image of it; it has the task to take the mind out of itself, not to shatter it'.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Calcidius***

In his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, Calcidius (c. 321 C.E.) offers a classification of oneiric phenomena, whose interpretation has been widely discussed,<sup>28</sup> constituted by

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<sup>23</sup> 'Ea autem, quae neque a deo neque a daemonio neque ab anima uidebuntur accidere, et praeter opinionem et praeter interpretationem et praeter enarrationem facultatis, ipsi proprie ecstasi et rationi eius separabuntur' [Those dreams which cannot be attributed to God, or the Devil, or the soul itself, since they are beyond expectation, or any ordinary explanation, or even of being intelligibly related, will have to be placed in a special category as arising from ecstasy and its attendant circumstances], *De anima*, 47, 4, p. 66, trans. Quain, quoted in Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 44 and p. 184, n. 31. Whether or not this is a further category to be added to the previous three, is still being discussed. On interpretation of Tertullian's passage see Kruger, p. 44 and p. 184, n. 31.

<sup>24</sup> 'Sic et in primordio somnus cum ecstasi dedicatus: et misit deus ecstasin in Adam et dormiit. [...] somnum ecstasi miscens' [Thus in the beginning sleep is commenced with ecstasy: and God sent ecstasy on Adam and he slept. [...] sleep is blended with ecstasy], *De anima*, 45, 3, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> 'Hanc vim ecstasin dicimus, excessum sensus et amentiae instar' [We call this force ecstasy, the overcoming of the senses and a form of being out of one's senses], *De anima*, 45, 3, p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> *De anima*, p. 480 n. 45.

<sup>27</sup> *De anima*, Waszink, p. 480 n. 45. For a discussion about the Montanist view, according to which 'prophets were mentally destroyed', see *ibid.*, p. 481. Kruger speaks of 'revelatory dream' being discussed in chapter 46 of *De anima*. In this chapter Tertullian uses the verb, 'revelantur', 46, 9, p. 64, and the adjective 'revelatoria', 47, 2, p. 65. However, in other chapters 'revelatio' appears as a noun (ch. 9), while illustrating the case of a nun whose gift ('charismata') is to converse with angels and even with the Lord. She sees and hears 'sacramenta' (communications) when she is 'in spiritu' during the mass. Tertullian uses 'in revelatione paradisi' when talking about Perpetua's vision on the day of her death (ch. 55). Therefore Tertullian appears to consider revelation as a religious phenomenon.

<sup>28</sup> For the discussion on Calcidius' classification see A. H. M. Kessels, 'Ancient Systems of Dream Classification', *Mnemosyne*, 22 (1969) 389-424, pp. 401-11, who relates the different interpretations which aimed to parallel Calcidius's and Macrobius's typologies of dreams. Kruger appears to identify two sets of 'summaries' in Calcidius's chapter 256: a three-tiered, and a five-tiered, *Dreaming*, pp. 30-31. However, other critics distinguish one five tiered classification, see Kessels, and Le Goff, 'Le Christianisme et le rêve', in T. Gregory ed., *I sogni nel medio Evo, seminario internazionale, Roma, 2-4 ottobre 1983*, Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985, pp. 171-215, pp. 184-5.

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five types of dreams: *somnium*, *uisum*, *admonitio*, *spectaculum*, and *revelatio*.<sup>29</sup> *Revelatio* is the highest phenomenon that can be experienced, as future things are displayed. *Spectaculum* includes exclusively phenomena that occur in the waking.

### Augustine and the States of Consciousness

Before moving on to Augustine's view on dreams, it is relevant to explore the states of consciousness he identifies. In addition to the contrast of life versus death, dream, ecstasy, and infirmity are considered.

#### *Life and Death*

Augustine defines life as being determined by the presence of the soul in the body. However, within life the soul can be in the body but 'free from the bodily senses',<sup>30</sup> which may occur in 'waking, in sleep and in ecstasy',<sup>31</sup> and in the state of infirmity.<sup>32</sup> Augustine states that the living and the dead inhabit separate worlds,<sup>33</sup> that the dead ignore what occurs on the earth to the living, and that the living do not have any knowledge of the world beyond.<sup>34</sup> Prophets represent the only exception, as they can

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<sup>29</sup> 'Somnium quidem, quod ex reliquis commotionum animae diximus oboriri. uisum uero, quod ex diuina uirtute legatur. admonitionem, cum angelicae bonitatis consiliis regimur atque admonemur. spectaculum, ut cum uigilantibus offert se uidendam caelestis potestas clare iubens aliquid aut prohibens forma et uoce mirabili. reuelationem, quotiens ignorantibus sortem futuram imminentis exitus secreta panduntur' [*Somnium* that we have said it arises from what is left of the motion of the soul. *Visum* which is sent by the divine power. *Admonitio* when we are ruled and admonished by the advice of the angelic goodness. *Spectaculum* when a heavenly power offers itself, to those who are awake, to be seen ordering or prohibiting something in a marvellous voice and form. The *revelatio* every time that secret matters of imminent issues are revealed to those who ignore the future fate], [http://www.chmtl.indiana.edu/tml/3rd-5th/CHALTIM\\_TEXT.html](http://www.chmtl.indiana.edu/tml/3rd-5th/CHALTIM_TEXT.html) [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> November 2008]. Kessels notices that *spectaculum* corresponds to the Greek *θεωσις*, which is employed in 2 *Maccabees* 15, 11-16 to define a vision in a dream, p. 405, n. 2.

<sup>30</sup> '[A] sensibus corporis alienata', *De genesi ad litteram*, Book 12, 5.14 <[http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/genesi\\_lettera/index2.htm](http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/genesi_lettera/index2.htm)> [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> November 2008]

<sup>31</sup> '[V]igilantes sive dormientis sive in ecstasi', *De gen.*, Book 12, 5.14.

<sup>32</sup> '[A]egrotantibus', *De gen.*, Book 12, 13.27.

<sup>33</sup> *De cura* 15.18 <[http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/cura\\_morti/index.htm](http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/cura_morti/index.htm)> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> November 2008]

<sup>34</sup> *De cura*, 13.16.

be instructed by the divine providence while they are still in this world. St Paul had the extraordinary experience of being 'ravished into heaven' while still alive.<sup>35</sup>

### *Dreams and Ecstasy*

Images seen in dreams and in visions have the same relevance. Although dreams are part of life, they are beyond the control and awareness of the bodily senses, a state where the soul is free from the burden of the body. Thus human beings can undergo marvellous experiences, such as ecstasy. Augustine differentiates between meaningless and meaningful dreams. Within the latter he distinguishes three kinds of dreams: those that are similar to future events; those that are announced as they will occur and finally those that need interpretation, their meaning being obscure.<sup>36</sup> Augustine's first type corresponds to Macrobius's *visio* and to Calcidius's *revelatio*; the second type is paralleled with Macrobius's *oraculum* and to Calcidius's *admonitio*; the third one to Macrobius's *somnium* and to Calcidius's *visum*.<sup>37</sup> Augustine's distinction recalls the pagan dream typology and does not emphasise the devil's influence on dreams' origin.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine acknowledges that dreams and ecstasy share a number of fundamental elements. More than once Augustine parallels ecstasy and dreams.<sup>39</sup> *Visio spirituale* is compared to dreams and, just like dreams, it can be false, true, clear, or obscure predictions.<sup>40</sup> Also the wonderful nature of visions is foregrounded and is paralleled

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<sup>35</sup> 'In paradisum raptus est', *De cura* 15.18.

<sup>36</sup> '[A]liquando futuris omnino similia, vel aperte dicta, aliquando obscuris significationibus et quasi figuratis locutionibus praeuntiata' [(the true dreams) are at times in all similar to the future. Either they are clearly expressed, or sometimes they are previsions expressed through obscure meanings and through a figurative manner], *De gen.*, Book 12, 18.39. See also Dulaey, p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> Dulaey, pp. 91-92.

<sup>38</sup> Le Goff, 'Le Christianisme', p. 201.

<sup>39</sup> See *De Gen.*, Book 12, 12.25; 12, 18.39-40.

<sup>40</sup> 'Ego visa ista omnia visis comparo somniantium. Sicut enim aliquando et haec falsa, aliquando autem vera sunt, aliquando perturbata, aliquando tranquilla; ipsa autem vera, aliquando futuris omnino similia, vel aperte dicta, aliquando obscuris significationibus et quasi figuratis locutionibus

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to dreams.<sup>41</sup> People, he states, show less interest in dreams as they occur everyday and to everyone, as opposed to ecstasy; that is why dreams are considered less wonderful.<sup>42</sup> Augustine is sure that the nature of images in both phenomena – dream and ecstasy – is not corporeal.<sup>43</sup> He maintains that a spiritual nature exists in which the images of the real objects are formed. The spiritual nature operates through a number of forces amongst which are dreams, both meaningless and significative, and sleep.<sup>44</sup> It expresses itself also through physical senses, during ‘thinking’, ‘cogitamus’,<sup>45</sup> during an illness or because of pain.<sup>46</sup> Finally the *natura spirituale* acts when the soul is possessed by a spirit and is ravished from the bodily senses so that it is totally absorbed in the spiritual vision of images of real things.<sup>47</sup>

### *Infirmity*

The spirit can see images in waking, sleep, and ecstasy,<sup>48</sup> and during infirmity.<sup>49</sup> Certainly images of objects, ‘corporales imagines’, seen by the spirit in wakefulness,

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praenuntiata: sic etiam illa omnia’ [I consider all these visions are similar to the images of those who dream. Dreams are sometimes false and sometimes true, sometimes unsettled, sometimes tranquil; the true dreams are at times in all similar to the future. Either they are clearly expressed, or sometimes they are previsions expressed through obscure meanings and through a figurative manner: the same can be said of all those], *De Gen.*, Book 12, 18.39.

<sup>41</sup> If Augustine is asked where the images seen in ecstasy come from, he answers by asking in his turn what the origin of the images appearing in dreams could be, *De gen.*, Book 12, 18.40.

<sup>42</sup> ‘[M]inus mira’, *De gen.*, Book 12, 18.40.

<sup>43</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 18.40.

<sup>44</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 23.49.

<sup>45</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 23.49. ‘Cogitatio’ merits some attention, as this concept will be found in medieval mystics conveying a meaning related to meditation and contemplation. In this case Augustine refers to ‘cogitatio’ as follows: when we think of objects non present but already known; when we have the intention of performing an act and we think about it in every detail in our thought; during the development of an action, *De gen.*, Book 12, 23.49. Dulaey remarks that ‘cogitare’ is considered as a technical term by Augustine, pp. 80-81.

<sup>46</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 23.49. Pain is a relevant aspect in mystics’ experience as it triggers bodily reactions such as formation of substances similar to drugs which might be able to provoke visions, see J. Kroll and B. Bachrach *The Mystic Mind: the Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics*, New York, Routledge, 2005. This aspect is further discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>47</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 23.49.

<sup>48</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 5.14.

<sup>49</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 13.27.

sleep, and illness are not always signs of other realities, 'aliorum rerum'.<sup>50</sup> However, it would be extraordinary, 'mirum', if images seen in ecstasy were meaningless.<sup>51</sup> Instances of extraordinary events during infirmity are related within the context of predictions.<sup>52</sup> The ill person can be possessed by an evil spirit or else can even be told how to be treated.<sup>53</sup>

Images seen in dreams are paralleled to those seen by ill people defined as phrenetics and 'furentes'.<sup>54</sup> Also in cases when the ill person loses consciousness – without being defined as phrenetic – the phenomenon is compared to dreams. In this case the experience is located in a place somewhere in the beyond from which Curma, the ill person, returned when he regained consciousness.<sup>55</sup> The relation between infirmity and visions within mysticism is explored further in the following chapter.

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<sup>50</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 13.27.

<sup>51</sup> 'Illud tamen dubium esse non debet, corporales imagines, quae spiritu cernuntur, non semper signa esse aliorum rerum, sive in vigilantibus, sive in dormientibus, sive in aegrotantibus: mirum est autem, si aliquando ecstasis fieri potest, ut non illae corporalium rerum similitudines aliquid significant' [One thing must not be doubted: the images of objects seen by the spirit, of those who are awake, who are asleep, and who are ill are not always sign of other realities: however, it would be a wonder if ecstasy occurred and those images similar to object did not have a significance], *De gen.*, Book 12, 13.27. The idea that the nature of the images seen in dreams, visions, ecstasy and in illness are similar can be found also in pseudo-Augustine's *De spiritu et anima*. 'Multa videt anima, et eadem natura est omnium visionum, sive in vigilantibus, sive in dormientibus, sive in aegrotantibus' [The soul sees many things and of the same nature of all visions, in the waking, during sleep, or in illness], XXIV, PL 40, col. 797. A few lines later 'aegrotantibus', ill people, is replaced by 'phreneticorum', 'frenetics'. Here again images seen by frenetics, images seen in dreams and in ecstasy are juxtaposed, PL 40, XXIV, col. 798. In the following chapter, the author identifies five kinds of dream: 'oraculum, visio, somnium, insomnium, et phantasma', and acknowledges the influences of the humours on dreams, *De spiritu et anima*, XXV, PL 40, col. 798.

<sup>52</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 17.35-38.

<sup>53</sup> The first case concerns a person who at first is said to be possessed by an evil spirit; later instead it is stated that he was in a state of fever, 'febriens', and perhaps even 'in phrenesi', *De gen.*, Book 12, 17.35. He only was relieved by the presence of the priest, whose arrival he had foreseen exactly. The last instance reported is of a boy 'mente sanissima', with a healthy mind, who suffered with terrible pains in his genitalia, *De gen.*, Book 12, 17.37. During his attacks, he shouted in pain, lost consciousness, and, although his eyes were open, he was not able to see around him and lost all physical sensations. When he returned to his senses, 'evigilans', he was able to recount the visions he had had. One Easter Sunday the boy had a vision, during which two people told him how he should be treated and finally healed. On following this suggestion, he did not suffer any further.

<sup>54</sup> 'Similia sunt autem somniis nonnulla etiam visa vigilantium, qui turbatos habent sensus, sicut phrenetici, vel quocumque furentes modo' [Those visions can be compared to dreams that some people have in wakefulness but whose senses are troubled, as occurs to phrenetics or to those who are somehow furious], *De cura* 12.14.

<sup>55</sup> The centurion Curma was able to experience the world beyond and to report what he saw. He fell ill, lost consciousness and lay down for several days as if dead. Meanwhile 'he saw many images as in

### *The three visions*

Augustine identifies *visio corporale*, *visio spirituale* and *visio intellectuale*. *Visio corporale*, experienced through the bodily senses, involves the sense of sight, and occurs in waking when the soul is not alienated from the bodily senses.<sup>56</sup> In the *visio spirituale* absent objects are represented in the imagination, both by recalling them to the memory and by forming the image of unknown things.<sup>57</sup> Whereas in the *corporale* material objects are seen, in the *spirituale* images of objects are perceived. The images of material objects can be impressed on the spirit because of a mental effort of concentration,<sup>58</sup> or because of a violent attack of illness, as it is the case of the phrenetics during fever, or finally because of a union with a spirit, whether good or evil.<sup>59</sup> In contrast ecstasy occurs when the attention of the mind, ‘*animi intentio*’, is completely alienated from the bodily senses. This takes place when visionaries, albeit with their eyes open, cannot see or hear what surrounds them; the concentration of the soul, ‘*animi contuitus*’, being focused on the images of the objects seen in the

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dream, that after a few days when he woke up he could narrate he had seen’, ‘[v]idebat tamen multa velut in somnis, quae tandem aliquando post dies plurimos quasi evigilans, visa narravit’, *De cura* 12.15. Curma comes back to his senses from ‘that place’ – ‘*illic unde redierat*’ – where ‘he had seen images as in his dreams’: ‘[i]n illis ergo visis, tamquam somniis suis’. Two more aspects of Curma’s dream are noteworthy: he is sent back to the earth because he is the wrong Curma who was to die, and secondly he is a blacksmith. The motif of the wrong person called to the other world recurs in other ancient narrations, see Dulaey, p. 208. In classical mythology the blacksmith is usually associated with hell, as is Vulcan for instance, and in traditional cultures the blacksmith is respected at the same level as a shaman, see M. Eliade, *Lo sciamanesimo e le tecniche arcaiche dell’estasi*, Roma, Mediterranee, 2005, pp. 499 ff., see also Dulaey, p. 208. Another instance of a dreamer-blacksmith who travels to hell is present in the Middle Ages, see below p. 47 n. 231.

<sup>56</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 12.25.

<sup>57</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 12.25.

<sup>58</sup> ‘[C]ogitationis intentione’, *De gen.*, Book 12, 12.25.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Cum autem vel nimia cogitationis intentione, vel aliqua vi morbi, ut phreneticis per febrem accidere solet, vel commixtione cuiusquam alterius spiritus seu mali seu boni, ita corporalium rerum in spiritu exprimuntur imagines’ [But when either because of a mental effort of concentration, or of a strong illness – as occurs to phrenetics during fever – or because of the union of some spirit either good or evil, the images of the material objects are impressed in the spirit], *De gen.*, Book 12, 12.25.

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spirit in the spiritual vision or on the immaterial objects with no representation in the intellectual vision.<sup>60</sup>

The causes of the spiritual vision are threefold. They can originate either in the body (as it occurs to those who dream or who are ill), or in the soul (when it is perturbed by feelings or passions including fear, wrath or love), or finally in the spirit, when the soul is ravished, both in healthy and ill people. If the cause is a bad spirit, then people become obsessed, 'arreptitios', or else false prophets. If on the contrary the spirit is good people utter mysterious words or, if the words are comprehensible, they are prophets who see and foretell future events as they have seen in the vision.<sup>61</sup> *Prophetia* is one of the gifts God bestows to particular people. Prophets are exclusive in their ability to penetrate the other world by means of divine will.<sup>62</sup>

There are special cases of spiritual visions, 'the soul being out of the senses, when it is more alienated than it is usual in sleep but less than in death'.<sup>63</sup> Through God's inspiration the soul sees future events. The seers are aware that those events belong to the future, because their minds obtain God's help or because a figure in the vision explains the meaning of the same vision, as occurred to John in the *Apocalypse*. This extraordinary occurrence is defined as '*revelatio*'.<sup>64</sup> The last two classes – prophecy and revelation – are significant further steps towards the ascent to God,<sup>65</sup> and they are retained by medieval philosophers.

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<sup>60</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 12.25.

<sup>61</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 19.41. 'Arreptitios' stems from the verb 'arripere', or 'adripere' formed from 'ad' and 'rapere', Forcellini, *Lexicon Totius Latinitatis*, vol. 1, 'arrepticius' <[http://www.veritatis-societas.org/219\\_Forcellini/1688-1768\\_Forcellini\\_Aeg\\_Lexicon\\_Totius\\_Latinitatis\\_Vol\\_1\\_A-C\\_%28Furlanetto\\_Ed%29\\_LT.pdf](http://www.veritatis-societas.org/219_Forcellini/1688-1768_Forcellini_Aeg_Lexicon_Totius_Latinitatis_Vol_1_A-C_%28Furlanetto_Ed%29_LT.pdf)> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011].

<sup>62</sup> *De cura*, 15.18.

<sup>63</sup> '[I]ta ut omnino a sensibus corporis avertatur amplius quam in somno solet, sed minus quam in morte', *De gen.*, Book 12, 26.53.

<sup>64</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 26.53.

<sup>65</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 8.19.



In *visio intellectualis* the soul is not deceived,<sup>66</sup> as it is free from both bodily senses and from images. The soul finds itself in the region of intellectual realities where truth appears without corporeal images and no cloud of false opinions obfuscates it.<sup>67</sup> In this sphere, the only and perfect virtue consists of loving what one sees.<sup>68</sup> Here the human soul is finally able to contemplate God's glory through a direct vision, as the human soul can perceive it by means of the divine grace.<sup>69</sup>

Augustine establishes an inner hierarchy within the three visions,<sup>70</sup> according to which the *visio intellectualis* is superior to the others. However, he also underlines the importance of each vision and their close interrelation. Although the spiritual vision is superior to the corporeal vision, there cannot be a spiritual vision without a corporeal one, during which the images of objects are formed in the spirit. The spiritual vision needs the intellectual vision, in that its content needs to be judged, whereas the intellectual vision does not need the spiritual one.

The philosopher displays the researcher's attitude: he is stupefied – 'stupeo' – by how quick and how easy it is for the images to be found in the soul. As to the origin of those images, he confesses that he ignores it.<sup>71</sup> He then moves on to reflect upon the different meanings conveyed by the term 'paradise', and parallels the three visions and the three heavens. Regarding the number of heavens and the grades of the spiritual and intellectual visions, Augustine admits that he can only know and illustrate those three types. Some maintain, he says, that there are many grades

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<sup>66</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 23.52.

<sup>67</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 26.54.

<sup>68</sup> '[A]mare quod videas', *De gen.*, Book 12, 26.54.

<sup>69</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 26.54.

<sup>70</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 11.22; 24.51.

<sup>71</sup> *De gen.*, Book 12, 18.40.

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depending on the revelations and on how luminous – ‘illustrium’ – they are. Establishing grading of each vision and the relative inner hierarchy, he confesses, he does not know.<sup>72</sup> This is a task that medieval philosophers and theologians will have the challenge of addressing. The main oneiric phenomena identified by Augustine will be revisited, and dreams – either caused by good or evil spirits – visions, revelations, and prophecy are acknowledged in the twelfth century. They are present in classifications both of philosophers of Aristotelian influence, including Albert the Great and Aquinas, and of mystical theologians of Augustinian tradition such as Bonaventure.

### Gregory the Great

After Augustine, the other great authoritative figure who permeates the cultural life of Middle Ages is Gregory the Great (540-604). He classifies the oneiric phenomenon and deals with its origin, which he finds both in human experience and in the Bible.<sup>73</sup> He identifies six causes of dreams: emptiness or fullness of the stomach, illusions, ‘cogitatio’, ‘thinking’, together with illusions, revelations, at times ‘cogitatio’, ‘thinking’, with revelations.<sup>74</sup> Whereas Gregory finds example for the last

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<sup>72</sup> ‘Ego visorum vel visionum praeter ista tria genera, aut corpore, aut spiritu, aut mente, usque adhuc vel nosse vel docere non possum. Sed quot et quanta singulorum generum sint differentiae, ut in unoquoque aliud alio gradatim superferatur, ignorare me fateor’ [So far I can only know or teach these three kinds of objects seen in dreams or visions: those in body, in spirit, and in mind. However, what is the number and the differences of each kind, and in what degrees they are superior to each other, I confess I ignore it], *De gen.*, Book 12, 29.57.

<sup>73</sup> Le Goff maintains that before Gregory an oneiric doctrine is not present, ‘Le Christianisme’, p. 193.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Aliquando namque somnia ventris plenitudine vel inanitate, aliquando vero illusionem, aliquando cogitationem simul et illusionem, aliquando revelationem, aliquando autem cogitationem simul et revelationem generantur’ [For sometimes dreams are engendered of fullness or emptiness of the belly, sometimes of illusion, sometimes of illusion and thought combined, sometimes of revelation, while sometimes they are engendered of imaginatio], *Morals on the Book of Job*, 24.42, the Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Oxford, John Henry Parker; and London F. and J. Rivington 1844, p. 448. The meaning of the verb ‘cogito’ is worth recalling: ‘mens plura in unum cogit, unde eligere possit. Itaque cogitare est plura mente cogere seu colligere ad aliquid inveniendum’ [The mind gathers many things in one, hence ‘cogitare’, to think, is to gather or to link with the mind in order to find something], Forcellini, ‘cogito’ <[http://www.veritatis-societas.org/219\\_Forcellini/1688-1768\\_Forcellini\\_Aeg](http://www.veritatis-societas.org/219_Forcellini/1688-1768_Forcellini_Aeg)

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four categories in the Bible, he does not explore the first two categories, for ‘we all know [them] for personal experience’.<sup>75</sup>

In Gregory’s classification, two elements are particularly relevant; the first being the wide role given to physicality. ‘Plenitude’ and ‘inanitate’ do not constitute a single category but two separate ones, as opposed to Macrobius, for instance. Probably Gregory refers to the effects of fasting on the human body and mind, and it is seen more as a preparation for dreams, or to the mystical experience (see following chapter). It recalls the ancient practice of incubation where fasting was one stage of the preparation.<sup>76</sup>

### **‘Illusio’**

‘Illusio’ constitutes a category on its own. It is the type of dream from which Gregory warns, as the ‘concealed guest’<sup>77</sup> could lead men astray, ‘errare’. At the same time it could be construed as a warning to give up divination by quoting from the Bible: ‘You will not address augurers, nor dream interpreters’.<sup>78</sup> After acknowledging dreams caused by the activity of the stomach, common to all, and after warning against illusion, that is to say the temptations of the spirits and the danger of divination through dreams, Gregory introduces the concept of ‘cogitatio’.

### **‘Cogitatio’**

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[\\_Lexicon\\_Totius\\_Latinitatis\\_Vol\\_1\\_A-C\\_%28Furlanetto\\_Ed%29\\_LT.pdf](#)> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> December 2010].

<sup>75</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogi de vita, Life and Miracles of St Benedict, Book Two of the Dialogues*, trans. O. J. Zimmerman, O.S.B, reprint of ed. pub. St John’s Abbey Press, Minnesota, Westport, Conn, Greenwood Press, [1980] 1949, IV, ch, 48, p. 261.

<sup>76</sup> Dodds, *I Greci e l’irrazionale*, p. 136. Also Artemidorus acknowledges the influence of food on dreams. An abundant ingestion of food, he maintains, prevents meaningful dreams, Del Corno trans., p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> The Latin text reads ‘ab occulto hoste’, which in contrast is rendered in the translation as ‘the Devil’, *Dialogues*, IV, cap. 48, Zimmerman trans., O.S.B., p. 261.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Non augurabimini, nec observabitis somnia’, *Leviticus*, xix, 26.

The effect of the thoughts was acknowledged by Augustine (see p. 11). Gregory bestows a twofold meaning to 'cogitatio' depending on whether it is combined with the deceptive illusion or with revelatory visions.<sup>79</sup> Gregory also warns that many dreams originate from cares.<sup>80</sup> Thought, together with revelation, 'cogitatione simul et revelatione', suggests the gift to interpret the message hidden in the revelation. It is the prophet Daniel who exemplifies this category.<sup>81</sup> Deceptive dreams caused by evil spirits can be discriminated from good ones by saintly men. Evil spirits may sometimes foretell true things in order to draw one's soul and then deceive it.<sup>82</sup> Saints are able to differentiate the voices and the images through 'inner sensitivity'.<sup>83</sup>

### **'Revelatio'**

Gregory provides two instances drawn from the Bible: Joseph's dream, and Mary's spouse's dream to flee to Egypt. He also demonstrates that sometimes revelations can be bestowed in order that death is not dreaded. They are the cases of revelations yielded to several monks who had been forewarned of their death.<sup>84</sup> The section

<sup>79</sup> 'Cogitatione simul et illusionem' is explained by an instance taken from *Ecclesiastes*, III, 15.

<sup>80</sup> 'Multas curas sequuntur somnia', *Dialogues*, IV, PL 77, 48, col. 409.

<sup>81</sup> 'Nequaquam Daniel propheta, Nebuchednezzar visionem disserens, a radice cogitationis inchoasset' [The Prophet Daniel, in interpreting the dream of Nabuchodonosor, would not have started on the basis of a thought], *Dialogues*, IV, PL 77, col. 409, Zimmerman trans., pp. 261-2. Daniel is deemed one of the highest prophets by Thomas Aquinas and Vincent of Beauvais, who consider that the highest prophet is the one who not only receives a revelation but rather the one who also has the gift to interpret other people's revelations (see p. 37).

<sup>82</sup> *Dial.*, PL 77, col. 412. The role of angelic or demonic forces in accordance to the Christian doctrine has been highlighted by scholars, see Kruger, pp. 46 ff. See also E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Cambridge University Press, 1965, pp. 17, 37 ff.

<sup>83</sup> '[Q]uodam intimo sapore', *Dial.*, PL 77, col. 412, trans. Zimmerman, O.S.B., p. 262. The same term is used by Augustine when explaining how his mother was able to discern between revelations sent by God and dreams deriving from her soul, 'Dicebat enim discernere se nescio quo sapore, quem uerbis explicare non poterat, quid interesset inter reuelantem te et animam somniantem' [she said that she could discern by a certain taste, which she cannot explain in words, the difference between your revelation and the dream of her soul], *Confessionum libri tredecim*, 6, 13 <<http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/confessionum/index2.htm>> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> November 2008]. See also Dulaey, p. 72. The term 'sapore', taste, stems from the same root as 'sapere', to know.

<sup>84</sup> In addition to the instances where a few days after the vision the monks fall sick and die, a case of a healing dream is reported. The monk John had been suffering from such a severe sickness that 'brought him to death's door', *Dial.*, trans. Zimmerman, O.S.B., p. 260, and the doctors had lost their hope that he would recover. In a vision the monk saw an old man who told him that he would not die

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devoted to dreams classification precedes the issue of soul, burial and death. In this Gregory recalls Augustine when he compares dreams and revelations to a deeper state than sleep, near to death but not yet death.<sup>85</sup>

### Isidore of Seville

Isidore (c. 560 - 636) follows Gregory in identifying the causes of dreams and employs the same terms. However, he appears to add 'cogitatio' as a definite origin of a type of dream,<sup>86</sup> and also mentions *excessus mentis* occurring during the quietness of rest.<sup>87</sup> The first categories – 'saturitate', 'inanitione' (fullness and emptiness of the stomach), 'cogitatione', and 'illusione' – are not meaningful, while the others, *cogitatio*, 'thinking', with illusions, and *cogitatio* with revelation, occur in a just manner, 'through the mystery of the divine revelation'.<sup>88</sup>

Arguably Isidore acknowledges the activity of the mind influencing dreams, 'cogitatio', and identifies it as a specific cause, as well as 'illutio' and 'revelatio'.

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because of that sickness and ordered him to rise. John soon recovered and devoted his life to serve God. Le Goff remarks that in Gregory dreams and visions are means that enable the journey to the beyond, see 'Le Christianisme', pp. 212-3.

<sup>85</sup> Also in Tertullian's *De anima* the discussion on dreams precedes the question of death: chapter 43 is devoted to sleep, chapters 45-49 regard dreams, and chapter 50 addresses death.

<sup>86</sup> 'Quaedam enim ex saturitate, seu inanitione occurrunt, quae per experientiam nota sunt. Quaedam vero ex propria cogitatione oriuntur; nam saepe quae in die cogitamus, in noctibus recognoscimus. Nonnullae autem visiones spirituum immundorum fiunt illusione' [There are different types of dreams. Some occur from fullness or emptiness (of the stomach), and they are known by experience. Some come from the thoughts, in effect often what we think about during the day is recognisable during the night. However, some visions occur because of illusion of the foul spirits], *Sententiarum libri tres*, III, 6, PL 83, col. 669. Although Isidore and Gregory put forward the same biblical instances to illustrate illusion – 'multos, inquit, errare fecerunt somnia' – the way in which the two authors refer to the spirits vary. What in Gregory is 'occulto hoste' in Isidore becomes first 'spirituum immundorum' and later 'Satanas', *Sent.*, III, 6, PL 83, cols. 669-670.

<sup>87</sup> 'Etenim saepe ea in quibus cogitationum nostrarum sensum porrigimus, quodam mentis excessu revelantur, dum requiescimus' [Often those upon which we linger the sense of our thoughts are revealed through ecstasy, whilst we rest], *Sent.*, III, 6, PL 83, col. 669.

<sup>88</sup> 'Porro quaedam iusto fiunt modo, id est, supernae revelationis mysterio [...]. Nonnunquam etiam et permiste accidunt visiones, id est cogitatione simul et illusionem, atque item cogitatione et revelatione' [Moreover, some occur in a just manner, that is to say through the mystery of superior revelation [...]. But sometimes visions occur blended, that is to say 'thinking' together with illusion, and also 'thinking' with revelation], *Sent.*, III, cap. 6, PL 83, col. 669.

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‘Cogitatio’ may acquire different characteristics: when it is the only cause it originates false dreams, whereas together with illusion or with revelation the phenomena generated pertain to the sphere of vision, for they show future events. ‘Cogitatio’ appears to be graded within the oneiric phenomena: from ‘cogitatio’ on its own – expressing thoughts and cares arising during daytime – to ‘cogitatio’ together with revelation, representing the gift of interpreting future events foreshown through revelation, which proceeds by divine will. That ‘cogitatio’ together with revelation belongs to another sphere of human experience is expressed by Isidore’s remark which relates this category to *‘mentis excessu’*.<sup>89</sup> One could argue that ‘cogitatio’ conveys a twofold significance: first as the ordinary activity of the mind during daytime, secondly it could refer to a first lower degree of meditation, as employed by the Victorines (see p. 43).

## 2. The Twelfth Century

Two periods in the development of medieval dream-lore can be identified: from the end of the fourth to the end of the seventh century of our era; and the second is marked by the transformations of the twelfth century.<sup>90</sup> Medieval scholars inherit knowledge of classical Antiquity – Pythagorism, Stoicism, through Cicero – by means of Macrobius’s work. In the first period clerics tend to keep people far from dream interpretation, as it was believed that demons could influence dreams and even be one of their possible causes,<sup>91</sup> as has been seen in Gregory the Great. Dreams are still among the events about which one should be circumspect. As a consequence a new figure results as the legitimate intermediary between visions coming from God and earthly events: the saint. Through the saint, and the associated sanctuaries, the High

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<sup>89</sup> *Sent.*, III, cap. 6, PL 83, col. 669, see note n. 87 above.

<sup>90</sup> Le Goff, ‘Les rêves’, p. 301.

<sup>91</sup> Le Goff, ‘Les rêves’, p. 304.

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Middle Ages reclaims the old practice of incubation.<sup>92</sup> Saints replace the old élites who in pre-Christian accounts used to receive meaningful dreams: the king (Pharao, Nebuchednezzar) and the hero (Scipio, Æneas). Whether their dreams come from God, as in the case of St Martin, or from Satan – St Anthony – they provide the trials on the path towards sanctity.<sup>93</sup> What takes place in the dream-lore province is part of the larger revolution in cultural life. It is the period when ideas are not limited to monks in abbeys, but rather commence to circulate into Schools and Universities,<sup>94</sup> and the rediscovery of Aristotle's works – through the translations from Greek and Arabic – influences philosophy and theology of the twelfth century.<sup>95</sup> The knowledge of his works comes to the western world via the acquaintance with the Arabic world – which at its turn had been influenced by the Hellenistic science, neoplatonic elements and the Islamic religion.<sup>96</sup>

From the twelfth century, the neutral *somnium* acquires more relevance, whilst the devil's influence recedes.<sup>97</sup> Dreams are studied in their connection to human psychology and physiology. The shift from oneiromancy towards medicine – and oneirology – is completed by Albert the Great (1206-1280) and by Arnaldus de Villanova (1240-1313).<sup>98</sup> The dream does not belong exclusively to the sphere of the sacred and it becomes more democratic. According to Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), for example, the dream, as well as the nightmare, is a common human

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<sup>92</sup> Le Goff, 'Les rêves', p. 305.

<sup>93</sup> Le Goff, 'Les rêves', p. 305. On saints replacing pagan heroes, see also M. Fattori, 'Sogni e temperamenti', in *I sogni nel Medio Evo*, Gregory ed., pp. 87-109, p. 108.

<sup>94</sup> G. Dumeige, *Richard de Saint-Victor et l'idée chrétienne de l'amour*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1952, pp. 1 ff; on the schools see F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, London, Search Press, 1971 [1950] 8 vols., vol. 2, chs. 16, 17, and on the universities see *ibid.*, pp. 212 ff.

<sup>95</sup> Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, pp. 205 ff.

<sup>96</sup> T. Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri' in *I sogni nel medio Evo*, ed. T. Gregory, Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985, pp. 111-148, p. 118.

<sup>97</sup> Le Goff, 'Les rêves', p. 305.

<sup>98</sup> Le Goff, 'Les rêves', p. 305.

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phenomenon.<sup>99</sup> The dream is one of the literary forms by which the culture of classical Antiquity is reclaimed and so are classical figures including the Sybil – as foreteller of Christianity – Socrates, Plato and Virgil, as its forerunners.<sup>100</sup>

### Aristotle's Influence in the Middle Ages

From the twelfth century Aristotle's works significantly contribute to the exploration of dream-lore, and influence western thought, paving the way for analysis of dreams based on physiology as well as on psychology.<sup>101</sup> Before moving on towards review of the twelfth-century philosophers, it is appropriate to illustrate briefly Aristotle's thought on dreams.

### Aristotle on Dreams and Divination by Dreams

Aristotle deals with sleep and dreams in *De somno et vigilia*, *De somnio*, and *De divinatione in somniis* where he analyses respectively sleep, dreams, and divination in dreams. He states that sleep is a natural state related to waking inasmuch as they are opposite and they are characterised by the presence or the absence of perception by senses.<sup>102</sup> During sleep, as in states of unconsciousness and fainting, perception decreases.<sup>103</sup> By

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<sup>99</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, ed. P. Kaiser, Lipsiae, Teubner, 1903, p. 305.

<sup>100</sup> Le Goff, 'Les rêves', p. 305.

<sup>101</sup> Two phases can be identified in this process. The first starts from around 1130 to 1190, when Aristotle's writings are translated from Arabic. About a century later, Robert of Grosseteste (1175-1253) and William of Moerbeke (1215-1286) – who provides Thomas Aquinas with texts to work on – translate directly from the original Greek texts, which allow Aristotle's thought to be disentangled from any influences of Neoplatonism or of Arabic philosophy, see G. Leff, *Medieval Thought: St Augustine to Ockham*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1958, pp. 171-5.

<sup>102</sup> 'Waking and sleep belong to the same element in an animal; for they are opposites, and sleep is a privation of waking', *De somno et vigilia*, [453 b24], in Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*, ed. D. Ross, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, p. 253.

<sup>103</sup> 'Sleep is not any and every incapacity of the organ of sense, but results from the exhalation arising from food. [...] That is why food tends to produce sleep', *De somno et vigilia*, [456b12; 456b21], in *Parva Naturalia*, Ross, p. 261. See Aristotele, *Il sonno e i sogni*, ed. L. Repici, Venezia, Marsilio, 2003, p. 99, [456b20].



relating sleep to perception and food ingestion,<sup>104</sup> Aristotle founds its causes in human physiology and agrees with the Hippocratic writers who related sleep to the movement of the blood and the digestive processes.<sup>105</sup> The dream is not defined as a means of knowledge – as it involves neither the senses nor the intellect: it is a perception of images appearing in sleep.<sup>106</sup> Aristotle concludes by defining a dream as ‘an image that arises from the movement of our sensations when and in so far as one is asleep – that is what a dream is.’<sup>107</sup> After establishing the physiological origin of sleep and dreams, Aristotle dismisses divine origins of dreams, in that it is a paradox if God be their sender and if people, not the best, would be rewarded with prophetic dreams.<sup>108</sup> A further confirmation to this is given by the fact that not only common but also melancholic people are able to foresee through ‘linear dreams’.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>104</sup> ‘Sleep is not any incapacity of perception because unconsciousness, a certain type of asphyxia, and swooning also produce this incapacity. There have been, however, the case of people taken by such deep faint, in which there has been also imagining’, *De somno et vigilia*, [456b5] in *Parva Naturalia*, Ross, p. 261. See Repici, p. 97 [456b10].

<sup>105</sup> Repici, p. 25; P. J. van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, Cambridge University Press, 2005 p. 172. Aristotle recalls that in distinguished physicians’ opinions, dreams are of high relevance, *De divinatione in somniis*, [463a5], Repici, p. 137. Sleep would function as a magnifier of smaller movements. The concept of movement reinforces the conclusion that dreams are not of divine origin: ‘These movements produce images, which lead to foresight even about such matters; and that is why ordinary people and not the wisest people have this experience. It would have occurred by day and to wise people if God had been the sender, but as things are it is natural that ordinary people should have foresight; for their minds are not thoughtful, but empty and open to every influence’, *De divinatione in somniis* [464a17], *Parva Naturalia*, Ross, p. 281. See Repici, p. 143.

<sup>106</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, [459a11], ‘A dream seems to be a sort of image (i.e. an image seen in sleep – whether this needs qualification or not), plainly dreaming is an activity of the sensitive faculty, but of it as being imaginative’, *Parva Naturalia*, Ross, p. 267. Repici, p. 129; see also Repici, p. 26. The same concept is reiterated in the conclusion: ‘A dream is an image seen in sleep; for the images just mentioned are not dreams, nor is anything else that appears when our senses are at liberty, nor indeed every image seen in sleep’, *Parva Naturalia*, [462a15], Ross, p. 276.

<sup>107</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, *Parva Naturalia*, [462a27], Ross, p. 276. See Repici, p. 129.

<sup>108</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, [462b18]. ‘It is paradoxical both that God should be the sender and that it should be not the best and wisest of men, but ordinary people, that receive such intimations’, *Parva Naturalia*, Ross, p. 279.

<sup>109</sup> *De somnio*, [463b12]. ‘This is shown by the fact that quite ordinary people have vivid dreams about the future; people whose nature is garrulous, as it were, and emotional see all sort of sights’, *Parva Naturalia*, Ross, p. 281. Two linguistic differences should be considered between the original Greek text and the English version that can be found in the last quotation. What is defined as ‘emotional’ in English is originally ‘μελαγχολική’, ‘melancholic’, see Repici, p. 138; Ross, [463b17]; and ‘vivid dreams’ is in fact ‘εὐθυονειροί’, ‘euthuoneiroi’, Ross, [463b16]; Repici, p. 138 n. 5, which can be rendered as ‘to have linear dreams’, see Repici, pp. 139; 170. These two linguistic discrepancies are not negligible. Repici chooses to translate the concept of εὐθυονειρία more literally as ‘linear dreams’, where linear indicates the idea of a straight road leading directly from actions of daytime to the images appearing at night in dreams. See Repici, pp. 70; 170 n. 5. Melancholic people are mentioned a number of times in

### *Dreams and States of Consciousness*

According to Aristotle, dreams can be ‘causes’, ‘signs’ of future events or coincidences.<sup>110</sup> This concept represents a *continuum* between the experiences of day and night time.<sup>111</sup> The belief of mutual influence of daytime actions on dreams recalls Macrobius’s *insomnium*. In this instance, however, it seems that the influence is reciprocal: not only from daytime to dreams but also from dream images to daytime actions. By means of the concept of ‘linear dream’, Aristotle traces another parallel between sleep and waking, in addition to the one stated at the beginning of his analysis of sleep in *De somno*.

While defining the states of sleep and dreams, Aristotle acknowledges other states of consciousness. He mentions ‘ecstatic people’,<sup>112</sup> and those affected by furious madness,<sup>113</sup> as they share the ability to foresee, which is explained by the lack of firmness of their thoughts, as they are ‘nimble-witted’,<sup>114</sup> and consequently they are able to perceive external movements. Since they are not able to concentrate on internal movements, these people are more receptive towards external ones.<sup>115</sup> Melancholic people share this trait too.<sup>116</sup> Finally visions perceived during illness and

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these works. Further, melancholy will be a recurring topic in medieval texts. The concept of melancholy derives from the ancient medical theory of humours. Four humours constitute human complexion: black bile, choler, phlegm and blood. Melancholic people are characterised by abundance of black bile (*melaina chole*). On melancholy related to dreames see Fattori, ‘I sogni e i temperamenti’, pp. 105 ff.

<sup>110</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, [462b27], Repici, p. 135.

<sup>111</sup> This thought is rendered in English as follows: ‘We often witness or do these [actions] in a *vivid dream* (the reason being that the way has been prepared for this by beginnings in waking life), so (conversely) phenomena of sleep must often be origins of our actions by day, because the thought of these has been prepared for in our nightly visions.’ *De divinatione in somniis*, [463a21], Ross, pp. 279-80, emphasis added.

<sup>112</sup> ἑκστατικοὶ, *De divinatione in somniis*, [464a24] Ross, p. 281; Repici, p. 142.

<sup>113</sup> ἐμμανεῖς *De divinatione in somniis* [464b1] Ross, pp. 281-2; Repici, p. 142.

<sup>114</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, Ross, p. 282.

<sup>115</sup> Repici, p. 172 n. 10.

<sup>116</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, [464a32]; Repici, p. 142.

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states of passion can be deceptive, as occurs to drunk and melancholic people.<sup>117</sup> Melancholic people are mentioned for their distorted images,<sup>118</sup> as people who are not inclined to sleeping,<sup>119</sup> and for their ability to have 'linear dreams', 'εὐθυνοειδία', and to foresee.<sup>120</sup> Their talent is explained because they are able to see what image comes next and to draw a link between similar images. This is the main quality of a dream interpreter, who, according to Aristotle, is someone skilful in identifying resemblances.<sup>121</sup>

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Has Aristotle only maintained that dreams derive from physiological causes, and refused the divine origin of dreams completely? Some ancient authors report different views expressed in other works by Aristotle, which have not survived to today.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *De somnio*, [460a32; b8], '[W]e are easily deceived while we are under the influence of emotion, e.g. of fear or of love; a small resemblance leads one to see his enemies, another to see his beloved; the more emotional he is, the smaller the resemblance that will serve.

In the same way anyone under the influence of anger or any desire is easily deceived, and the stronger the passion, the more so. This is why to people in fever combinations of lines on the wall that little resemble animals seem to be animals. These experiences are sometimes intensified along with their feelings; if they are not very ill they know the appearance is false, but if they are more seriously ill they even move with reference to the supposed animals', Ross, p. 271. Drunk people experience images that 'sometimes are confused, monstrous, and incoherent, as in the case of people who are high-strung, fevered, or drunk', *De somniis*, [461a14], Ross ed., p. 274. Here it is to be noted that the Greek text for 'high-strung' has 'μαλαγχολικοῖς', 'melancholic', [461a22] Repici, p. 124.

<sup>118</sup> *De somnio*, [461a20], Repici, p. 125.

<sup>119</sup> *De somno et vigilia* [457a27], Repici, p. 141.

<sup>120</sup> *De divinatione in somniis* [463b17; 464a32,33], Repici, pp. 139, 141.

<sup>121</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, [464b5-16], Repici, p. 143.

<sup>122</sup> It may be the case that he has not always denied the divine origin of dreams. For a wide discussion about how to interpret Aristotle's view, whether as a correction of a previous mistake or as evolution in his thought, see Repici, pp. 180-192 and p. 193 n. 10. In a passage of *Eudemian Ethics* while dealing with the relationship between wisdom and good fortune, Aristotle notices that people who have good fortune are such because the divine is in them. This is the same reason why melancholic people have 'linear dreams'. In both types of people the divine principle becomes more powerful, as their reason is weakened. This would imply that the divine principle would be the origin of 'linear dreams'. Repici, p. 81. However, such a view is in contrast with what is stated in *De divinatione in somniis*, where the main focus is to demonstrate that dreams are not of divine origin. With regard to the development of Aristotle's works and thought, see Ross, pp. 3-9.

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Two passages from *De divinatione in somniis* are worth considering. At the very start Aristotle admits that 'the belief in divination based on dreams should not be lightly rejected nor lightly accepted'.<sup>123</sup> The fact that many people believe that dreams have a meaning would suggest that this belief is based on experience, and it is not unbelievable that divination in dreams exists.<sup>124</sup> The second passage, already quoted, is the one where Aristotle confutes the divine origin of dreams on the basis that common people, and not the best ones, could receive divine dreams.<sup>125</sup> As van der Eijk notices, implicitly Aristotle appears to accept divine dreams. What if an oneiric phenomenon occurred during the day and to a wise person? In the light of this last reflection, rather than holding a rigid position it would probably be advisable to leave a door ajar for further possible interpretations.<sup>126</sup>

### Aristotelianism

In the new cultural atmosphere of the twelfth century, dreams are studied within the discourse of medicine and physiology.<sup>127</sup> They are regarded as a means of natural knowledge expressed through symbols or metaphorical images.<sup>128</sup> Causes of dreams are considered to be physiological and linked to the humours.<sup>129</sup> Thus dreams do not only belong to the sphere of communication with the divine under form of

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<sup>123</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, [462b12]; Ross, p. 279; Repici, p. 135.

<sup>124</sup> *De divinatione in somniis*, [462b16]. Repici's translation is: 'It is not unbelievable that divination by dreams exists as it has some reasons; thus one could believe the same thing also for other dreams', Repici, p. 135. Ross's commentary is as follows: 'The belief in divination based on dreams should not be lightly rejected nor lightly accepted. Its wide acceptance suggests that it is based on experience, and its truth in certain cases, probable in itself, suggests that it may have a general application', Ross, p. 279. The sentence where Aristotle alludes to 'other dreams' does not appear in Ross.

<sup>125</sup> 'It would have occurred by day and to wise people if God had been the sender [...]', *De divinatione in somniis*, [464a17] Ross, p. 281; Repici, p. 143.

<sup>126</sup> Van der Eijk, p. 189. On this point Kruger seems to be categorical when he states that 'These Aristotelian works [...] reintroduced into European discourse the possibility that dreams are *never* divine in origin', p. 84; emphasis added. See below 'Bonaventure' p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> T. Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri', pp. 112-3. See also A. Peden, 'Macrobius and Mediaeval Dream Literature', p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> T. Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri', p. 115.

<sup>129</sup> See Fattori, 'Sogni e temperamenti', pp. 100 ff.

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revelations coming from God, from angels or demons – from the Augustinian tradition – they also pertain to the philosophical, astrological and medical field. However, within this period in which this shift towards Aristotelianism appears so predominant, some philosophers remain faithful to the Augustinian tradition against Aristotle.<sup>130</sup> Dreams, visions, revelations, and ecstasy preserve their function of communication between human and divine, and as a source of true knowledge, both according to Thomas and to the Augustinian Bonaventure. Augustine's views on visions are revalued as they do not focus on the origin of dreams but rather on the soul and the *pneuma*. He then becomes the father of the new Christian oneirology.<sup>131</sup>

### John of Salisbury

John of Salisbury (c. 1120-1180) finds physiological causes of dreams, although he does not exclude the divine aspect completely from his analysis. He includes his dream theory within the discourse on natural and divine signa, '*signa*' which can be false or true.<sup>132</sup> His list of the five kinds of dreams, '*insomnium, aut phantasma, aut somnium, aut oraculum, aut visio*', recalls Macrobius's terminology and theory.<sup>133</sup> The

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<sup>130</sup> On the philosophers who respond against Aristotelianism, William of Auvergne (c. 1180 - 1249), Alexander of Hales (1170/80 - 1245), Robert Grosseteste (1175 - 1253), and John de La Rochelle (c. 1200 - 1245), see Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, chs. 23, 24. See also Abbagnano, *Storia della filosofia. Il pensiero medievale e rinascimentale: dal misticismo a Bacone*, Roma, 2006, 12 Vols., vol. 2, pp. 111 ff. Copleston remarks that although the above-mentioned philosophers continued the Augustinian tradition, they had an open-minded attitude towards the new current of thought, p. 218. By means of his knowledge of Aristotle and the Arabic philosophers William of Auvergne represents a relevant development in Augustinianism, in that he paves the way to Albert's and Thomas's Aristotelianism, p. 228. Copleston also underscores that an important consequence of the translation movement was that it 'helped to clarify [...] the relation between philosophy and theology and contributed very largely to the delimitation of the provinces of the two sciences', since the system of Aristotle and of the Arabic thinkers such as Avicenna and Averroes were achieved without revelation but rather through human reason, p. 208. On the distinction between theology and philosophy see also J. Le Goff, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, pp. 271-2.

<sup>131</sup> J. Le Goff, 'Le Christianisme et le rêve', in *I sogni nel Medio Evo*, Gregory ed., pp. 171-215, p. 203.

<sup>132</sup> '*Signa etenim interdum uera, interdum falsa sunt*' [Signs are sometimes true, and sometimes false], *Polycraticus*, Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis *polycratici: sive de nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum*, libri VIII, ed. C. I. Webb, vols. 2, Oxonii, e Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1909, vol. 1, ch. 14, p. 87, ed. Webb, vol. 1, II, 14, p. 87. See also Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri', p. 116.

<sup>133</sup> *Polycraticus*, Webb, II, 15, p. 88.

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causes of *insomnium* and of *phantasma* are found in physical aspects,<sup>134</sup> and as such they lack any significance, as they are caused by a mental or physical illness.<sup>135</sup> The category of *phantasma* includes the *ephialtes*, or nightmare, as in Macrobius. *Visio* is characterised by imparting direct knowledge, whereas in *oraculum* a person worthy of reverence communicates to the dreamer.<sup>136</sup> Also the definition of *somnium* follows Macrobius's inasmuch its meaning – 'being wrapped in a veil'<sup>137</sup> – is hidden and needs interpreting, and it is subdivided into five subcategories from personal to general.<sup>138</sup>

As to dream interpretation John of Salisbury acknowledges the art of interpreting dreams, the *ars coniectoria*. However, he is cautious when it comes to fore-knowledge of future events. He reflects on the fact that although *signa* are often similar, they may convey different meanings; that is why the dream interpreter should be circumspect in understanding different events forewarned by same *signa*.<sup>139</sup> He maintains that it is not possible to read *signa* with a degree of certainty – as this only belongs to God –

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<sup>134</sup> '[I]nsomnia ex ebrietate vel crapula, aut variis passionis corporis affectuumque tumultibus et reliquiis cogitationum frequentissime oriuntur' [*Insomnia*, vain dreams originate from drunkenness or from food, or from a number of bodily passions, and very often from the turmoil of feelings, and from what is left of the thoughts], *Polycraticus*, Webb, II, 15, 429a, p. 88.

<sup>135</sup> 'Has quidem species ex infirmitate mentis et corporis tradunt phisici provenire' [Physicians maintain that this kind originates from illness of the body or of the mind], *Polycraticus*, II, 15, Webb, p. 89.

<sup>136</sup> 'Cum vero luce immediata seipsam infundit, visio est, ex eo quod plena et uera specie sui oculis uideatur esse subiecta; [...] Cum uero res per quietem alio nuntiante clarescit, si tamen enuntiantis honesta cuique persona sit et uenerabilis, in oraculorum speciem cadit. Est enim oraculum, ut ait quidam, diuina uoluntas ore homini enuntiata' [When this irradiates in immediate light, that is a vision because it appears to be presented to one's eyes under a full and true image; ... When another person communicates this in the quiet, and if this person is honest and venerable, then it is the case of the oracle; as someone said, the oracle is the divine will communicated through human voice], *Polycraticus*, Bk II, 15, Webb, pp. 91-2.

<sup>137</sup> '[Q]uasi uelum figurarum oppandit', *Polycraticus*, II, 15, Webb, p. 94.

<sup>138</sup> '[S]omnium uero cuius appellatio communis est, [...] per quaedam inuolucra rerum gerit imagines, in quibus coniectorum praecipue disciplina versatur, et nunc suum cuique est, nunc alienum, modo commune, interdum publicum aut generale est' [Dream, as it is called commonly, [...] contains images of things wrapped in a veil, and it is with this that the interpretation deals; and it is personal, at times it pertains to another person, at times it is common, public or general], *Polycraticus*, II, 15, p. 89.

<sup>139</sup> 'Et quia signa frequenter eadem, in eo uel maxime ars coniectoris apparet, si sub identitate signorum diuersitatem rerum cauta discretionem distinguit' [And as signs are often the same, the art of the interpreter appears more evidently, if in the case of identical signs he distinguishes the diversity of things by means of a cautious discretion], *Polycraticus*, II, 16, pp. 94-5.

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and that there is not a univocal regular correspondence between *signa* and their meanings.<sup>140</sup> As a consequence John warns against the danger of falling into superstition, of being credulous and to believe in dream interpretation and in the books of dreams that circulate among curious people.<sup>141</sup> The examples of Joseph and Daniel follow in order to clarify the concept that the gift of dream reading was bestowed to them by God.<sup>142</sup> 'If someone has been endowed of the same skill, they can join the two biblical figures, and like them may they thank and acknowledge God'.<sup>143</sup>

John of Salisbury refrains from solving the problem between human freedom and divine plan, which is the conflict which divination theories have to deal with.<sup>144</sup> His attitude towards the multiplicity of significance held by dreams and *signa* can be contradictory, in that he appears both to value dreams and to warn against them as deceptive.<sup>145</sup> However, the ambiguity arising from dreams could be explained within the development of the dream discourse in the course of time. Such development can be more clearly noticed in literary works.<sup>146</sup> In saints' lives dreams and visions were always true, whereas starting in the twelfth century a transformation takes place, in that a dream can be either true or false. What may appear as a contradiction leads in contrast to overcome the dual opposition of truth versus falsehood. Instances of literary works such as *Le dit de la panthère d'Amour*, which offers two contradictory

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<sup>140</sup> *Polycraticus*, II, 17, Webb, p. 97; see also Gregory, pp. 115-6.

<sup>141</sup> *Polycraticus*, II, 17, Webb, pp. 97-8.

<sup>142</sup> 'Domino dictante', *Polycraticus*, II, 17, Webb, p. 99.

<sup>143</sup> 'Si quis est qui pari gratiae privilegio gaudeat, accedat ad Danielelem et Ioseph, et similiter eis Domino gratuletur', *Polycraticus*, II, 17, Webb, p. 99.

<sup>144</sup> Gregory, p. 118.

<sup>145</sup> According to K. Lynch, John of Salisbury 'does not resolve the contradictions in his discussion of dreams', *The High Medieval Dream Vision*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1988, p. 75.

<sup>146</sup> The idea of this paragraph is based on C. Marchello-Nizia, 'La rhétorique des songes et le songe comme rhétorique dans la littérature française médiévale', in *I sogni nel Medio Evo*, Gregory ed., pp. 245-259, pp. 250-7.

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dreams and no indication concerning which one is true, can be evidence of a transformation.<sup>147</sup>

### Pascalis Romanus

Pascalis Romanus (second half of the twelfth century) does not belong to the Augustinian tradition and is one of the representatives of the new cultural climate.<sup>148</sup> He unites astronomy and dream-lore, as through dreams it is possible to reveal what is hidden to human knowledge and to grasp the link between macrocosm and microcosm. Pascalis Romanus provides a specific space to the dream-lore, and maintains that dream interpreters should co-operate closely with astrologers, as their purpose is to decipher the mysteries of the world.<sup>149</sup> Pascalis Romanus gathers the knowledge concerning the dream-lore popular around 1160 when he is active in Constantinople.<sup>150</sup> Although as a compendium it is not organic, still it contains some dream theories acknowledged at the time.<sup>151</sup> Explanations and causes belonging to different spheres of knowledge – thence with different level of authority – find their place side by side. For instance after mentioning blood as a physical cause of dreams, Pascalis Romanus moves straight on to ‘visiones’, ‘illusiones’ and then he mentions

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<sup>147</sup> ‘Ce qui, à un premier niveau, peut apparaître comme une contradiction inexplicable indique en fait que le critère de validité des songes s’est déplacé, qu’il est à chercher ailleurs désormais que dans leur origine ou dans leur réalisation’ [What at a first level could appear as an unexplainable contradiction indicates in fact that the criterion of validity of the dreams has moved, that it is to be searched for somewhere else rather than in their origin or in their coming true], Marchelo-Nizia, p. 256. Marchelo-Nizia links this stage of the employment of dream to the linguistic development of the conditional clause in medieval French, which corresponds neither to truth nor to falsehood, but rather to an ‘indécidable’, undecidable stage. Dreams do not necessitate interpretation any longer, and yet they still maintain their allegorical level, p. 257.

<sup>148</sup> Gregory, ‘I sogni e gli astri’, p. 112.

<sup>149</sup> Gregory, ‘I sogni e gli astri’, p. 112.

<sup>150</sup> Pascalis Romanus, *Le “Liber thesauri occulti” de Pascalis Romanus. Un traité d’interprétation des songes du XIIIe siècle*, ed. S. Collin-Roset. An offprint from “Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge”, Paris, 1964, p. 112.

<sup>151</sup> Collin-Roset, p. 140. On different theories related in one work see also Peden, ‘Macrobius and Mediaeval Dream Literature’, p. 65.



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the devil,<sup>152</sup> thus conveying the medical scientific theories, as well as religious doctrine concerning dreams. Furthermore, he blends aspects of the dream-books that are usually kept separated, as Books II and III constitute a work of such kind.

As regard to dream classification, Pascalis Romanus refers to Gregory the Great and widely reports Macrobius's fivefold classification.<sup>153</sup> However, Pascalis Romanus adds some information deriving from the medical field, as is the case of the 'phantasma', and the subcategory of 'ephialtes', which he connects to an infirmity of the head, an illness which passes once the head has been purged.<sup>154</sup> These fantasies occur especially in the moment between sleep and waking. This infirmity is associated to phrenesy, 'frenesium', when many images appear to the sufferers also in waking.<sup>155</sup> In another moment Pascalis Romanus dwells upon 'frenesis', associating it both to mania and to melancholy.<sup>156</sup> Phenomena at first sight belonging to different fields are put on the same level: dreams (or images seen during dreams), mania and delirium, temporary madness and melancholy.<sup>157</sup>

As has been stated, Pascalis Romanus's *Liber Thesaurii Occulti* also belongs to the dream-book type. From the beginning the author expresses himself in terms pertaining to divination, as the employment of verbs such as 'vaticinate', and 'foretell' confirms.<sup>158</sup> What is worth dwelling upon is how Pascalis Romanus conciliates the

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<sup>152</sup> 'Dyabolus', Bk I, 3, p. 150.

<sup>153</sup> Bk I, 3, p. 151. From Gregory he mentions 'visiones, cogitationes et illusiones atque item cognitione et revelatione', and keeps Macrobius's general framework of classification, Bk I, 8, pp. 156-161. There is a textual note whereby 'cognitione' can be 'cogitatione', p. 151 n. 157. See also Kruger, pp. 70-73.

<sup>154</sup> '[C]apitis infirmitate', Bk I, 10, p. 158.

<sup>155</sup> Bk I, 10, p. 158. Collin-Roset points out that, being a temporary delirium, the 'phantasma' is associated to mania, p. 158 n. z.

<sup>156</sup> Bk I, 3, p. 151.

<sup>157</sup> Also Aristotle unites dreams, phrenetics and melancholic in his analysis of dreams. It is worth remembering that the melancholic type is believed to see a great number of images.

<sup>158</sup> '[V]aticinare', 'antepredicunt', Bk I, respectively pp. 142, 144.

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religious authority of the Bible with divination.<sup>159</sup> In Book I he differentiates the two spheres: devilish phenomena from divination by dreams. Indeed he states that divine knowledge, namely dreams, visions and oracles are not to be prohibited, but rather the devilish phenomena are.<sup>160</sup> By not limiting the analysis of dreams to divine dreams, that is to say revelations sent by divine will, Pascalis Romanus is a representative of the twelfth century attaching importance to the influence of scientific and philosophic tradition deriving from the recent translations from Arabic and Greek and of Aristotle's works.<sup>161</sup> However, considering the initial statement supporting divination and the frequent parallels with the Bible, Pascalis Romanus is wary not to let his work fall outside the boundaries of the accepted knowledge.<sup>162</sup>

In order that dream interpretation is as accurate as possible, the interpreter must consider a number of variables and theories: universal dream classifications together with knowledge both of astronomy, and of the dreamer as an individual and their social rank. The same dream has a different meaning depending on whether the dreamer is a king, a common person, a priest or a woman, just to mention a few instances.<sup>163</sup> By considering the time and date in which the dream occurs, 'differentias

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<sup>159</sup> See Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri', p. 112.

<sup>160</sup> 'Non enim phisica et divine cognitiones, sompnia, visiones vel oracula, prohibentur, sed demonice incantationes, maleficia, sortilegia, insompnia ac vana fantasmata ne facile hiis credas, condempnantur' [Knowledge of natural and divine kind, dreams, visions or oracles are not prohibited, but devilish incantations, sorcery, witchcraft, vain dreams and vain phantasms are condemned so that you do not believe in them easily], Bk. I, 1, p. 145. The people dealing with these phenomena appear to be specialised in the different techniques: the charmer, 'incantator', someone who makes use of blood and corpses; the 'magus' foretells to individuals; the 'mathematicus' analyses the data of the birth date and who interprets natural dreams, as opposed to the 'incantator' who specialises in interpreting fantastical ones, 'phantasticorum somniorum', Bk. I, 1, p. 145.

<sup>161</sup> See Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri', pp. 112, 115.

<sup>162</sup> As Collin-Roset remarks, in the second part of his work Pascalis Romanus interprets Artemidorus and Achmet in a Christian sense, p. 140.

<sup>163</sup> '[H]abitum et dignitatem', the custom and the rank of the individual must be taken into account, see L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science during the First Thirteen Centuries of our Era*, Vol.2, New York, Columbia University Press, 1923, 2 Vols., Vol. II, p. 299. 'Nam unum idemque sompnium aliter significat regi, aliter populari viro, aliter religioso, aliter impio, aliter militi et aliter homini rustico, aliter diviti, aliter pauperi, aliter in viro, aliter in uxore, aliter in virgine, aliter in corrupta' [A same dream has a meaning for the king, another for a common man, another for a religious person, another for an impious, another for a soldier, and another for a peasant, another for

temporum et horarum', Pascalis Romanus establishes a connection between earth and heavens, microcosm and macrocosm.<sup>164</sup>

Pascalis Romanus founds his work on the basis of the search for knowledge, which necessitates being discovered, as it is hidden, 'occulti'. Terms like 'interpretatio', 'enigma' and 'tegumento' referring to dreams are often reiterated.<sup>165</sup> Once the knowledge is found, it will be highly precious, a treasure indeed. The hidden treasure is paralleled with hidden knowledge, 'sapientia abscondita'.<sup>166</sup> By drawing both images from the Bible, Pascalis Romanus defines his aim so that his work is acceptable, being set under the authority of the Scripture.<sup>167</sup> But Pascalis Romanus moves the concept of interpretation of the signs appearing in dreams even further. He establishes a clear parallel between dream interpretation and Scripture. In dreams, as in the Bible, one should look beyond the materiality of the 'letter' in order to observe the spirit, 'spiritum', and the true meaning.<sup>168</sup> Moreover Pascalis Romanus applies to Macrobius's classification the senses of the Scripture, devising a correspondence between *fantasia* and *fabula*, *insomnium* and *proverbium* or *parabola*, *visio* and *historia*, *oraculum* and *prophecy*, and *somnium* with *allegoria*.<sup>169</sup>

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a rich or for a poor man, another for a man, another for a woman, for a maiden, another for a corrupted woman], Bk II, 1, p. 165.

<sup>164</sup> '[I]mpossibile est naturas ac vices rerum perfecte cognoscere, nisi a superioribus sedibus a quibus dependent eliciantur' [It is impossible to know the nature and the vices of things perfectly, but if they are deducted from the superior places on which they depend], Bk I, 17, p. 165. See also Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri', p. 112.

<sup>165</sup> Bk I, 1, pp. 141, 143; 'et quod sompnio vel visione per enigma monstratur, sagaci ratione discernere' [What is shown by dream or vision by means of enigmata, you discern by means of the sharp reason], Bk I, 7, p. 146.

<sup>166</sup> Bk I, 1, p. 141.

<sup>167</sup> Gregory, 'I sogni e gli astri', p. 112.

<sup>168</sup> 'In divina scriptura [...] non ymaginem et corpus littere sed spiritum et significatam veritatem perscrutemur' [In the divine Scripture we do not observe the image and the letter but rather the spirit and the signified truth], Bk I, 1, p. 146. Gregory, p. 115.

<sup>169</sup> 'Est itaque fantasia tamquam fabula, insomnium velud proverbium vel parabola, visio tamquam hystoria, oraculum ut propheta, sompnium allegoria', Bk I, 14, p. 160. Gregory also notices this, 'I sogni e gli astri', p. 148 n. 104. This process recalls, even though by far and in a different context, Richard of St Victor's parallel between oneiric phenomena and degrees of contemplation: vision as knowledge; dream as *alienatio*; and prophecy as contemplation. See also Richard's statement: 'Scriptura

## Albert the Great

In his work *De somno et vigilia* Albert the Great (1206-1280) acknowledges the divinatory dream as originated by a cause external and superior to man that Albert locates in the heavenly spheres.<sup>170</sup> In sleep, during rapture from the senses, ‘alienatio [...] a sensibus’, the influence of the spheres is expressed through *imaginatio*, for then it is stronger and it is acknowledged by the human soul.<sup>171</sup> Thus dreams are heavenly forms that are expressed by the oneiric *phantasia* through symbols and metaphorical images.<sup>172</sup> Depending on the strength of this form, Albert classifies thirteen degrees of oneiric phenomena, from dream to prophecy.<sup>173</sup> The first seven types include dreams, and are followed by four degrees of visions and by two of prophecy. They range from the lowest degree – when the heavenly form is not expressed in imagination or in intellect but it is rather a premonition<sup>174</sup> – through to higher degrees when *imaginatio* expresses itself by means of more and more complex metaphors, ‘simulacra’. Starting from the fifth degree a relevant role is played by the light of *intelligentia*, at first still not totally free of *phantasmata*, then clearer and clearer, as in the sixth degree, which teaches the future meaning of the vision rightly, ‘qui docet recte futuram visionis significationem’. The seventh degree, the cause of which is found in the light of *intelligentia*, consists of a dream without metaphoric images, *simulacra*.<sup>175</sup> From the eighth degree, Albert does not speak of *somnia* but rather of

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sacra saepe unum dicit, et aliud innuit’, [Often the Scripture says one thing and hints to something else], *De eruditione hominis interioris libri tres*, I, 1, PL 196 col. 1231, see p. 60 n. 290.

<sup>170</sup> Gregory, p. 123.

<sup>171</sup> Quotations of Albert the Great’s *De somno et vigilia* are from <<http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~albertus/>> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2010].

<sup>172</sup> Albert underlines the physiological aspect of dreams, making a parallel with concupiscence which provokes erotic images. In so doing, he stresses the physicality of the phenomenon, see Gregory, p. 126.

<sup>173</sup> *De somno et vigilia*, III, I, 10, pp. 190b-192a. See also Gregory, pp. 127-8. Dreams and prophecy form a scalar progress: from the knowledge acquired through the senses to the one attained through the heavenly intelligence. This view was present in Avicenna and Maimonides, see Gregory, p. 121.

<sup>174</sup> ‘[C]or dicit’, *De somno et vigilia*, III, I, 10, 191a.

<sup>175</sup> ‘Septimus autem gradus est, quando adhuc in somno vere et expresse apparent intelligentiae sine simulacris’ [The seventh degree is when in sleep the intelligences appear in a clear and evident way

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visions in waking, 'in vigilia'. The final and highest grade is prophecy, distinguished into two types: the twelfth degree, the prophecy that forewarns about hidden things and future events,<sup>176</sup> and the thirteenth degree the highest form of expression of the human soul.<sup>177</sup>

Although Albert distinguishes between dream, vision and prophecy – the first being characterised by occurrence during sleep – it is relevant that dreams are ranked on the same scale as visions and prophecy, as they all occur during *alienatio*, even though at different degrees of it. Moreover they all have prophetic value, since they are influenced by the heavenly spheres and they express themselves by means of *phantasia*. While dreams are characterised by *phantasmata*, the content of visions and prophecy is not direct, but rather it is symbolical.<sup>178</sup>

Defining dream-lore as a natural science rather than as a phenomenon based on divine causes could clash with the theological aspect of the discipline. The natural perspective where dreams and prophecy – the borders of which are not clearly

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without complex metaphors], *De somno et vigilia*, III, I, 10, 192a. Scipio's dream represents an example of this degree; see also Gregory, p. 128, n. 48.

<sup>176</sup> 'Ille est primus gradus prophetiae, de qua Philosophi sunt locuti. Et ille est quando videntur expresse imagines rerum futurarum, sicut eveniunt in vigilia aversis et interius retractis sensibus: talis enim praenuntiat occulta et futura' [This is the first degree of prophecy, of which the philosophers talk. And this occurs when images of future things are seen clearly, as they occur during the waking when the senses are moved away and withdrawn in further depth. It foretells the future and hidden things], *De somno et vigilia*, III, I, 10, 193a. See also Gregory, p. 128.

<sup>177</sup> 'Decimus tertius gradus complementum est prophetiae, quando bona occulta per coelestium instinctum sic praeconcepit, quod veram intelligentiam de his habet etiam absque magna sensuum aversione: et iste gradus est summa humanae animae' [The thirteenth degree is the completion of prophecy, when through heavenly inspiration it preconceives the good hidden things, as it has a true comprehension of these through utmost withdrawal of the senses: this degree is the apex of the human soul], *De somno et vigilia*, III, I, 10, 193a. See also Gregory p. 129, n. 49.

<sup>178</sup> Gregory, pp. 129-30. The gap between divination, the prediction of future events, and reality is explained as the *forma coeleste*, the heavenly form, does not act directly on the individual but rather through intermediaries. Therefore *signa* can be interpreted in a way that is valid generally; the same can be said of *divinatio per somnia*. The prediction will be more precise if a higher number of elements are considered; the higher the number the more precise the prediction, Gregory, p. 131.

defined – are based, exclude the divine influence. Nonetheless, they keep their prophetic feature through which it is possible to foreknow the future.<sup>179</sup>

### Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) inherits this clash when exploring prophecy. He devotes several articles both to divination, amongst which an article to *divinatio per somnia*,<sup>180</sup> and to prophecy.<sup>181</sup> Thomas acknowledges the divinatory dreams, as long as they are not dreams caused by demons, recalls the examples of Joseph and Daniel from sacred history,<sup>182</sup> as during sleep the human soul is more receptive.<sup>183</sup>

According to Thomas, dreams can have inward or outward causes, each of which has two aspects. Inward causes can regard either the soul, in the case of thoughts that have occupied the dreamer's mind during waking, or the body, through the influence of humours. The outward causes have two aspects: the bodily when 'some images affected by the disposition of the heavenly bodies appear to the dreamer',<sup>184</sup> and the spiritual 'which originates from God, who sometimes bestows revelations to men in dreams through Angels'.<sup>185</sup> Thomas concludes that divination through dreams is not unlawful, provided that dreams are originated in true divine revelation, or else it would fall into superstition.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Gregory, p. 133.

<sup>180</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II, II, quaestio 95, art. 6. Quotations from *Summa Theologiae* are from: <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth3092.html> [accessed November 2008]

<sup>181</sup> *Summa Th.*, II, II, QQ. 171-175.

<sup>182</sup> *Summa Th.*, II, II, quaestio 95, a. 6, resp.; see also Gregory p. 135.

<sup>183</sup> '[A]nima, quando abstrahitur a corporalibus, aptior redditur ad percipiendum influxum spiritualium substantiarum' [When it withdraws from the body, the soul is more apt to perceive the influence of the spiritual substances], *Summa Th.*, II, II, Q. 172, a. 1, ad. 1.

<sup>184</sup> '[U]t sic dormienti aliquae phantasiae appareant conformes caelestium dispositioni', *Summa Th.*, II, II, Q. 95, a. 6, resp.

<sup>185</sup> 'Spiritualis autem causa est quandoque quidem a Deo, qui ministerio Angelorum aliqua hominibus revelat in somniis', *Summa Th.*, II, II, Q. 95, a. 6, resp.

<sup>186</sup> 'Sic ergo dicendum quod si quis utatur somniis ad praecognoscenda futura secundum quod somnia procedunt ex revelatione divina; [...] non erit illicita divinatio. Si autem huiusmodi divinatio causetur ex

Similarly to Albert, Thomas distinguishes between dreams, visions and prophecy: dreams consist of apparitions received during sleep, whereas visions occur in waking when the individual is detached from senses.<sup>187</sup> As to prophecy, Thomas maintains that prophecy depends exclusively on God, thus excluding other natural causes.<sup>188</sup> He identifies different degrees of prophecy which can occur either in sleep or in wakefulness.<sup>189</sup>

### Vincent of Beauvais

The encyclopaedic *De somno et vigilia* by Vincent of Beauvais (1190-1264) concludes the present section on Aristotelianism. Although he is considered a mere compiler, his work is relevant, as he had access to a large library, even compared to other

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revelatione Daemonum cum quibus pacta habentur expressa, quia ad hoc invocantur; vel tacita, quia huiusmodi divinatio extenditur ad quod se non potest extendere, erit divinatio illicita et superstitiosa' [If anyone uses dreams to foretell the future when he knows that they come from a divine revelation, or, observing its limits, from some natural cause, internal or external, then this is not unlawful divination. But if the foretelling comes from the disclosure by demons with whom a pact has been made, whether express, by invoking them, or tacit, by seeking knowledge out of human reach, then this is superstitious and unlawful divination], *Summa Th.*, II, II, Q. 95, a. 6, resp., *Summa theologiae: Latin text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries*, vol. 40, Blackfriars New York, McGraw-Hill, [1964-81], p. 59.

<sup>187</sup> 'Prophetia differt a somnio et visione, ut somnium dicamus apparitionem quae fit homini in dormiendo, visionem vero quae fit in vigilando, tamen homine a sensibus abstracto' [The prophecy is different from the dream and the vision, as we say that the dream appears in sleep to men, the vision occurs in waking, at times when the man has withdrawn from his senses], *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate a quaestione XII ad quaestionem XIII*. The quotations from *Quaestiones disputatae* are from <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/qdv12.html> - *De veritate*, Q. 12 a. 3> [accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2008]. See also Gregory, p. 134, n. 64.

<sup>188</sup> 'Prophetica praecognitio potest esse de futuris dupliciter, uno modo, secundum quod sunt in seipsis; alio modo, secundum quod sunt in suis causis. Praecognoscere autem futura secundum quod sunt in seipsis, est proprium divini intellectus, cuius aeternitati sunt omnia praesentia [...] Et ideo talis praecognitio futurorum non potest esse a natura, sed solum ex revelatione divina' [There can be two sorts of prophetic knowledge of future events, first knowing the events in themselves, secondly, knowing them in their causes. But to know future events in themselves is proper to the divine intelligence whose eternity is ever present to all things [...] And so a knowledge of the future of this sort cannot proceed from nature but only from divine revelation], *Summa theologiae: Latin text and English translation, introductions, notes, appendices, and glossaries*, vol. 45, Blackfriars, New York, McGraw-Hill, [1964-81], pp. 29-31, Q. 172, a. 1, resp.

<sup>189</sup> Aquinas classifies the different degrees of prophecy, *Summa Th.*, II, II, Q. 174, a. 1, 3. He recalls the seven types, 'species', of prophecy according to Isidore, within which 'dream' is the third, Q. 174, a.1, 3, p. 69 and three types of 'imprinting imaginative forms': dreams, visions, and ecstasy, Q. 174, a. 1, p. 73, *Summa theologiae: Latin text and English translation, introductions, notes, appendices, and glossaries*, vol. 45.

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encyclopedists of his time.<sup>190</sup> In his general overview of the phenomena and their causes, Vincent warns of the possible discrepancies between statements gathered from different authorities,<sup>191</sup> and does not leave out physical and natural causes of dreams. He reports the classifications by Macrobius and Gregory the Great, includes the influence of digestion, of thoughts, the movements of the moon and planets, the position of the body during sleep, and the season.<sup>192</sup> In addition to this, as dream images are signs, they do not show but rather suggest future events by means of symbols.<sup>193</sup> The sequence addressing divine dreams represents a turning point in the course of the work, in that Vincent acknowledges the divergence of opinions between Aristotle and Gregory.<sup>194</sup> Within visions, Vincent identifies a number of phenomena: revelation and prophecy, ecstasy, rapture, and *excessus mentis*.<sup>195</sup> These phenomena, that are all included in *elevatio*, are expounded in an ascending order.<sup>196</sup> A brief outline of Vincent's compilation on the highest oneiric phenomena illustrates that the synthesis between the physiology of dreams is still juxtaposed with contemplation and *excessus mentis* at the end of the thirteenth century.

### ***Revelation and Prophecy***

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<sup>190</sup> Thorndike, Vol. 2, p. 462.

<sup>191</sup> See Thorndike, vol. 2, pp. 457, 463. In his *De somno et vigilia* Vincent proceeds by following the structure of Aristotle's treatise on sleep and dreams, by dealing with sleep first and then dreams. For a discussion on the correspondence between the structure of the two works, see Kruger, pp. 103-115. However, Vincent completes his overview by illustrating *revelatio*, prophecy, and *excessus mentis*.

<sup>192</sup> Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum quadruplex, sive Speculum maius: naturale, doctrinale, morale, historiale, Speculum Naturale*, Douai, Ex Officina Typografica et Sumptibus Balthazaris Belleri in Circino Aureo, 1624, 1, repr. Graz, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964, *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 55, col. 1873.

<sup>193</sup> According to Vincent, for instance, to dream fire signifies future anger, ch. 55, col. 1873. Dreaming fire has a different meaning according to medieval dreambooks, where fire corresponds mainly to 'danger', see Fischer, p. 70.

<sup>194</sup> Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 59, col. 1875. See also Kruger, pp. 103-115.

<sup>195</sup> Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26. Revelation is dealt with in chs. 56, 61, 87; prophecy in chs. 81-95; rapture in ch. 100; and *excessus mentis* in chs. 103-111.

<sup>196</sup> It is a characteristic trait of Vincent's to analyse and introduce each phenomenon in hierarchical order of importance without neglecting their relative subdivisions.



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Revelation is of two kinds: the first when the divine will is understood directly – and this is a prophecy – the second is a combination of images, and is a dream, as ‘there are no dreams without images’.<sup>197</sup> Revelation occurring through angels shares elements both of prophecy and of dreams depending on the images seen.<sup>198</sup> It is defined as a divine inspiration that announces the future events, where divine inspiration is knowledge disclosed by God. Prophecy is a kind of vision, but, Vincent warns, not all visions are prophecies.<sup>199</sup>

Vincent proceeds to illustrate who the prophet is, the four modes or degrees of the prophecy and finally how it occurs. He who announces, ‘denunciat’, future things, is called a prophet, yet he who can interpret what someone else has seen is a higher kind of prophet than the one who himself has seen.<sup>200</sup> Prophecy is constituted by four degrees. The first is made up by two acts: ‘visio’ and ‘denunciatio’.<sup>201</sup> The second degree can occur either in sleep or in waking; yet, the degree of prophecy is more wonderful when it occurs in waking. The third degree is based on hearing words, and the fourth on the vision rather than on hearing.<sup>202</sup>

To be able to see a *visio imaginaria*, the prophet is ravished by a spirit out of his senses.<sup>203</sup> The abstraction from the senses can occur in two modes: a natural cause,

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<sup>197</sup> ‘[S]ine phantasmatibus non est aliquod somnium’, *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 56, col. 1873.

<sup>198</sup> *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 56, col. 1874.

<sup>199</sup> *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 81, col. 1889.

<sup>200</sup> The Pharaoh was a prophet, but Joseph was a higher prophet, as he could interpret the meaning of the Pharaoh’s dream images, the ears of wheat and the cows, *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 81, col. 1889. It is worth remarking that the verb ‘denunciare’ is the same employed by Macrobius when describing *oraculum* (see p. 6) and that *denunciatio* is one of the two acts constituting prophecy as Vincent relates.

<sup>201</sup> *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 89, col. 1897. Each act requires two elements. ‘Visio’ involves ‘iudicium’ and ‘acceptio’ [judgment and acceptance], ‘denunciatio’ necessitates ‘audacia’ and ‘signum’, audacity and sign, *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 95, col. 1902.

<sup>202</sup> In the third degree the clearer the words are heard the more sublime the prophecy is. In the fourth when the prophet sees an angel speaking, the degree is higher than when he sees a human form and even higher if God is seen, *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 95, col. 1903.

<sup>203</sup> *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 89, col. 1897.

when the external senses are stupefied, 'stupescunt', during infirmity, or because of the vapours raising to the brain; and an animal cause, when someone is thoroughly abstracted out of their senses because of an exceptional attention towards intelligible or imaginative matters.<sup>204</sup> The prophetic experience never occurs due to infirmity (as is the case of epileptics or furious people), but rather only through sleep, or vision.<sup>205</sup>

### ***Ecstasy and Rapture***

Ecstasy is the moment when the soul is ravished completely out of the bodily senses and the prophet is not aware either of the visible things, people or voices around him. The attention of the soul concentrates on the images seen through the *visio spirituale* or on the intelligible ones seen in the *visio intellectuale*.<sup>206</sup> *Excessus mentis*, ecstasy, and rapture are illustrated through instances from the Bible which share the ascent towards a level above the ordinary state, by means of abstraction from one's senses: Paul who was ravished, as was John the Evangelist, who was in spirit, and Peter who was in 'excessus mentis'.<sup>207</sup>

An apparently secondary detail deserves being mentioned here. Vincent recalls a quotation from Gregory the Great concerning contemplation: he who is ravished from the visible things in order to understand interior things, closes his eyes.<sup>208</sup> The eyes closed, thus recall ecstasy and rapture, as well as dream and sleep. The

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<sup>204</sup> *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 89, col. 1897. It will be seen in Part II of the present study that 'stupor' is a state of consciousness often referred to by poets commencing a dream vision, be it an explicit dream or not.

<sup>205</sup> 'Numquam autem fit in Propheta abstractio a sensibus corporalibus per egritudinem, sicut fit epilepticis vel furiosis, sed solummodo [...], scilicet, per somnum. [...] vel in visione' [Prophecy never occurs because of withdrawal of the senses during an illness, as is the case of epileptics and of furious people, but only through sleep or in vision], *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 89, col. 1897.

<sup>206</sup> *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 96, col. 1903.

<sup>207</sup> *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 111, col. 1916.

<sup>208</sup> '[Q]ui ad intelligenda interiora rapitur a rebus visibilibus oculos claudit' [He who is ravished from the visible things towards understanding of the things within himself, closes his eyes], *Speculum Naturale*, Bk. 26, ch. 111, col. 1916.

figurative imagery of the visionary with his eyes closed conveys a literal significance of physiological sleep and dream. Further at a symbolic exegetical level, it signals the transitional ecstatic state. This is relevant as the oneiric imagery widely employed in literary dream visions enables to comprehend implied significance of medieval poetic dream visions, as is explored in Part II.

### ***3. Mystical Theologians***

#### **Hildegard of Bingen**

At the turn of the eleventh century sleep and dreams are explored among other human conditions by Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) in her *Causae et curae*. Hildegard's contribution is notable, although she does not present a classification constituted by definite categories. However, in her overview some of the categories identified so far are clearly recognisable.

As sleep acts upon the soul, increasing 'wisdom and knowledge in the human to his life's delight',<sup>209</sup> it is possible to see the future during sleep, 'corpore dormiente'.<sup>210</sup> Oneiric phenomena can be due to the divine element of the human soul and these are dreams come true as they have been seen, but Hildegard does not specify whether this is a case of vision or prophecy. Other phenomena are caused by the evil spirit, together with the activity of the mind.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Causae et Curae*, trans. M. Berger, Woodbridge, D. S. Brewer, 1999, pp. 65-6; 'et sapientiam et scientiam in eodem homine dilatat laetante vita eius', *Causae et curae*, ed. Kaiser, p. 81.

<sup>210</sup> *Causae et curae*, Kaiser ed., p. 89.

<sup>211</sup> 'Saepe etiam evenit, quod aut diabolica illusionem fatigata aut turbata mente gravata [...] Nam multoties cogitationibus et opinionibus atque voluntatibus, quibus homo vigilans occupatur' [It often occurs either because of devil's illusion or because the mind is burdened and troubled. In effect often man is burdened by thoughts, opinions, and wills, that have occupied him in waking], Kaiser, p. 82. Some categories can be recognised here: illusion and thoughts from the waking, 'cogitationes', recalling Gregory the Great's types.

The tempting and deceiving activity of the devil is the cause of illusions, both in sleep and in waking. The dream depends on the kind of thoughts brewing in one's mind during waking. Indeed if the person has had good thoughts, then it is more likely that they will receive a true dream by means of divine grace. Thus Hildegard relates daily life, dreams and moral question.<sup>212</sup> Apparently Hildegard refers, though not explicitly, to Gregory's category of 'thinking' with illusion or with revelation, '*cogitatione simul illusionem*' or '*simul revelationem*'. In sum, in Hildegard's view the following categories can be recognised: a visionary phenomenon – probably a revelatory one – mainly based on sight; illusions caused by the devil (defined as '*diabolus*' rather than spirit or demon); *cogitatio* with illusion in case of bad thoughts, and finally *cogitatio* with revelation, in case of good thoughts. Furthermore, she lists among the kind of thoughts and feelings 'joy and sadness, anger or distress, ambition to dominate or other such things'.<sup>213</sup> Unlike Gregory, Hildegard lists dreams starting from the highest kind, revelation, and deals with the physical aspect later, while considering the influence of the body.<sup>214</sup>

### The Victorines' Way to Contemplation

The Victorines are included in this overview not so much because they systematise dreams, as because they state that dreams and visions lead to contemplation and ecstasy. Exploring some of the works by Hugh and Richard of St Victor illustrates

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<sup>212</sup> 'Quod si bonae et sanctae sunt, gratia dei illi saepe vera in eis ostendit; si autem vanae sunt, diabolus hoc videns animam hominis illius multotiens tunc terret et mendacia sua cogitationibus illis intermiscet' [If they are good and holy the divine grace is often shown in them, but if they are false the devil, seeing this, terrifies the man's soul and blends his falsehood to those thoughts], Kaiser, pp. 82-83.

<sup>213</sup> Berger, p. 66. Berger parallels daily thoughts and wishes to Freud's 'Tagesreste' and maintains that Hildegard seems to forerun recent psychoanalytic theories, p. 144. Daily thoughts and memories are believed to influence dreams also by Macrobius and other classical authors. See also Dulaey, pp. 98 ff.

<sup>214</sup> Kaiser, pp. 85-86.

how dreams and visions interconnect directly with the search for the true knowledge, and how they develop the concept of 'cogitatio', seen previously in Augustine and Gregory (see p. 17). In order to do this, it is essential to dwell briefly upon the gnoseologic aspect of the Victorines' reflection.

Hugh and Richard conciliate reason and faith, in the wake of the tradition of the Abbey of St Victor combining contemplation with intellectual research.<sup>215</sup> According to Hugh (1096–1141) temporal things can be known through experience, whereas the knowledge of eternal things is attained either by reason or partly by faith.<sup>216</sup> Reason on its own cannot explain all that is eternal. That can be revealed directly by God, so this knowledge is based on faith.<sup>217</sup> Hugh sets the way of the soul to achieve contemplation: a long process which necessitates preparation and purification,<sup>218</sup> and which is based upon the three stages of *cogitatio*, *meditatio* and *contemplatio*.<sup>219</sup> *Cogitatio* deals with an object or its image; *meditatio* interprets the reflection on *cogitatio*<sup>220</sup> and finally *contemplatio* is the sight the free soul achieves.

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<sup>215</sup> Ray C. Petry ed., *Late Medieval Mysticism*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 13, London, S.C.M. Press, 1957, p. 79.

<sup>216</sup> 'Modi sunt duo et viae duae, et manifestationes duae, quibus a principio cordi humano latens proditus est et iudicatus occultus Deus; partim scilicet ratione humana, partim revelatione divina' [There are two manners and two ways, and two manifestations, for which from the beginning God hiding in human heart is passed down and deemed hidden; partly by human reason partly by divine revelation], Hugh of St Victor, *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, 1, III, iii, PL 176, col. 217.

<sup>217</sup> Abbagnano, p. 21.

<sup>218</sup> Petry, p. 82.

<sup>219</sup> 'Cogitatio est cum mens notione rerum transitorie tangitur, cum ipsa res sua imagine animo subito praesentatur, vel per sensum ingrediens, vel a memoria exurgens. Meditatio est assidua ac sagax retractatio cogitationis, aliquid obscurum explicare nitens, vel scrutans penetrare occultum. Contemplatio est perspicax et liber animi intuitus in res perspiciendas usquequaque diffusas' ['Thinking' is when the mind is touched by the notion of things in a transitory manner, when the thing itself is presented suddenly as its image to the soul either through entering the senses or emerging from memory. Meditation is constant and sharp retraction of thinking, something that shines to explain something obscure or that by scrutinising penetrates that which is hidden. Contemplation is free and discerning insight of the soul whilst perceiving the things wherever they are diffused], Hugh of St Victor, *De modo dicendi et meditandi*, PL 176, col. 879.

<sup>220</sup> Previously Hugh defines *meditatio* as 'frequens cogitatio cum consilio' [frequent thinking with advice], PL 176, col. 878.

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Richard (d. 1173) develops Hugh's tripartite scheme towards knowledge further. *Benjamin minor* shows the way to contemplation and *Benjamin major* illustrates the types of contemplation.<sup>221</sup> *Benjamin major* acknowledges the same degrees of the rational soul set forth by Hugh, *cogitatio*, *meditatio* and *contemplatio*, and further defines each of them. It shows the soul's way to contemplation 'from outward to inward thence upward and beyond'.<sup>222</sup> Richard also describes the way they move upwards.<sup>223</sup> Within contemplation the soul enlarges itself, elevates itself and then it is ravished.<sup>224</sup>

The three movements (*dilatatur*, *elevatur*, *rapitur*) parallel the soul's ascent to contemplation: *dilatatio*, *sublevatio*, *alienatio*.<sup>225</sup> *Dilatatio* is the enlargement of the mind occurring without trespassing the limits of human activity. In *sublevatio* the mind elevates beyond the natural limits of human activity by divine will, although it does not abandon the earthly boundary and does not enter the last degree, as the object of the vision is above itself and at the same time it still can see the usual things. Finally *alienatio*, makes transcending the human limits possible: the mind loses the memory

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<sup>221</sup> Petry, pp. 82-83. These works signify that human reason united to divine grace generates higher knowledge, of which Benjamin is the symbol. That is why he is the last born: because contemplation 'is the last fruit of the spirit', Petry, p. 83. Mystical life commences with the self knowledge of the soul, Abbagnano p. 24.

<sup>222</sup> Petry, p. 83.

<sup>223</sup> The thought always wanders here and there among solitary roads and slowly; meditation proceeds towards the aim among obstacles; and contemplation circles with extraordinary agility in a free flight, *Benjamin major*, 1, 3, PL 196, col. 66. Wishing to stress further the movements of each degree, Richard continues: 'Cogitatio serpit, meditatio incedit et ut multum currit. Contemplatio autem omnia circumvolat, et cum voluerit se in summis librat' [The thought snakes, meditation walks solemnly and hastes, but contemplation flies above everything and whilst flying it hovers in the height], *Benjamin major*, 1, 3, PL 196, col. 66. 'Serpit' denotes the serpentine movement at ground level; 'incedit' and 'currit' convey a connotation of proceeding upright – like the human posture; and finally the flight in the height, 'circumvolat in summis', is opposed to the initial 'serpit'.

<sup>224</sup> 'Denique quoties contemplantis animus dilatatur ad ima; quoties elevatur ad summa, quoties acuitur ad inscrutabilia, [...] rapitur per innumera' [Finally the soul of the contemplative expands to depth, it elevates to the height of what cannot be peered at, [...] it is ravished towards innumerable matters], *Benjamin major*, 1, 3, PL 196, col. 67.

<sup>225</sup> *Benjamin major*, 5, 2, PL 196, col. 169. As regards to contemplation Richard also distinguishes six 'genera', PL 196, cols. 70-71. See also Petry, pp. 83-84.

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of the present things and enters a state of transfiguration by means of the divine will.<sup>226</sup>

*Dilatatio* is attainable through human activity, *alienatio* is only achievable through divine grace, whereas *sublevatio* shares both states.<sup>227</sup> *Alienatio* represents the pinnacle of contemplation when human mind experiences ecstasy, *excessus mentis*. Correspondences could be synthesised in the following way:

Object of knowledge	Functions of the soul	Degrees	(The contemplative soul)	Degrees to Contemplation
Sensibles	<i>Imaginatio</i>	<i>Cogitatio</i>	Dilatatur ad ima	<i>Dilatatio</i>
Intelligibles	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>Meditatio</i>	Elevatur ad summa	<i>Sublevatio</i>
Intellectibles	<i>Intelligentia</i>	<i>Contemplatio</i>	Rapitur per innumera	<i>Alienatio</i>

Richard illustrates the highest moments of contemplation with three dreams from the Bible. It is crucial to dwell upon these instances in order to understand the three states of contemplation better, for they display images and metaphors that are employed also by the Middle English mystics, as will be seen in the following chapter. *Dilatatio* is exemplified by Abraham whom God orders to raise his eyes and

<sup>226</sup> 'Mentis dilatatio est quando animi acies latius expanditur et vehementius acuitur, modum tamen humanae industriae nullatenus supergreditur. Mentis sublevatio est quando intelligentiae vivacitas divinitus irradiata humanae industriae metas transcendit, nec tamen in mentis alienationem transit, ita ut et supra se sit quod videat, et tamen ab assuetis penitus non recedat. Mentis alienatio est quando praesentium memoria menti excidit, et in peregrinum quemdam et humanae industriae invium animi statum divinae operationis transfiguratione transit' [The enlarging of the mind is when the gaze of the soul expands widely and is intensely sharpened, but this in no way goes beyond the limit of human effort. The raising of the mind is when the activity of the intelligence, divinely illuminated, transcends the limits of human effort but does not go over into ecstasy, so that what it sees is above its powers, but the soul does not withdraw from its accustomed ways of knowing. The alienation of the mind (or ecstasy) is when the memory of things present withdraws from the mind and it moves by a transfiguration divinely wrought, into a strange state of soul unattainable by human effort], *Benjamin major*, 5, 2, PL 196, col. 170. C. Kirchberger trans., *Richard of St Victor: Sacred Writings on Contemplation*, London, Faber, 1957, p. 183.

<sup>227</sup> *Benjamin major*, 5, 2, PL 196, col. 170.

look upwards (*Gen.* 13). Moyses provides instances for the next two grades: he is commanded to climb the mountain and to look at the land around (*Deut.* 34) – representing *sublevatio*, whereas *alienatio* is epitomised by Moyses led up the mountain where he accesses, ‘accessit’, God through the cloud (*Matth.* 17).<sup>228</sup> Moyses’s ascent to the highest state of contemplation displays divine intervention, since ascending to the mountain signifies the elevation of the human mind to a superior level of knowledge. Furthermore, when climbing the mountain, Moyses is surrounded by a cloud of oblivion, ‘per oblivionis nebulam’, and then he can contemplate God. Finally in *excessus mentis* his mind forgets human matters, the cloud having the function of illuminating divine things while concurrently obfuscating the human sphere of activity.<sup>229</sup>

The role played by memory is pivotal during the ascent to contemplation and the achievement of *excessus mentis* as well as during the analysis of dreams and visions, as *alienatio* can also occur in dreams.<sup>230</sup> Memory<sup>231</sup> and *alienatio* intertwine with dreams,

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<sup>228</sup> *Benjamin Major*, 5, 2, PL 196, col. 170.

<sup>229</sup> ‘Una itaque et eadem nubes et lucendo obumbravit, et obumbrando illuminavit, quia et illuminavit ad divina et obnubilavit ad humana’ [One and the same cloud overshadowed by shining and enlightened by shadowing, for it illuminated divine things and clouded over human things], *Benjamin Major*, 5, 2, PL 196, col. 171; Kirchberger, p. 185.

<sup>230</sup> ‘Hinc est quod rex Nabuchodonosor somnium vidit, sed excussus a somno visum somnium ad memoria revocare non potuit’ [This is the case of Nebuchadnezzar who had a vision in a dream, but rising from sleep he could not recall to mind what he had seen in his dream], *Benjamin Major*, 5, 1, PL 196, col. 169; Kirchberger, p. 182.

<sup>231</sup> Remembrance is the linking thread between ordinary and alienated states. Coming back to one’s own senses after a vision or an ecstatic experience resonates with the poet’s task to narrate what s/he has seen or what was heard. The narration of the experience is possible by means of remembrance, an act of memory, see *HF*; Dante is told to remember what he sees so that he is able to report it once back. Hence the invocation to superior forces, usually supernatural, be they the Muses or divine powers, in order to be able to remember so that the poets can accomplish their task and their poetic work. In passing, memory is still a crucial function in the process of coming back to one’s senses. Thomas More explained for a person who recovered from such state, he ‘gathered hys remembraunce to hym and begonne to come agayne to hymselfe’, quoted in C. T. Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 3. The fact that memory can link the two states implies that it was thought there was continuity between the two worlds. Therefore it was feasible to pass from the one of ordinary state of being to another one. This transition between stages is similar to a step into the world of the beyond, into the world of dead, where, however, the journey is allowed only to a special individual: the hero. He can be the literary hero, the creator of poetry, the *vates*, or the mystic. Many narrations of visionary experiences confirm the belief in the continuity of the worlds: during his journey to the beyond whilst ill, where



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as exemplified by Nebuchednezzar's dream. Nebuchednezzar (*Dan.* 8) experienced *alienatio* in his dream, but he could not retain the images seen in the dream in his memory. Richard explains that for some people recalling what was seen during the *alienatio* is not possible at all, once they come back to their ordinary state, whereas for others remembering the images is rather easy, as is the Pharaoh's case (*Gen.* 41).<sup>232</sup> Daniel is able to interpret the king's dream by means of divine will and of the memory, in that without it, it would not be possible to interpret the dream and to foretell future events. Nebuchednezzar could experience the revelation of truth hidden by a mystical veil, 'mystico velamine', whereas Daniel could perceive and retain the image.<sup>233</sup>

### *Dreams and Contemplation*

Arguably, both dreams and the Bible necessitate interpretation.<sup>234</sup> Dreams are pivotal in acquiring a true knowledge and accessing *alienatio*. Contemplation, dreams and visions are closely interrelated in Richard's thought. *Somnium* and contemplation are explicitly associated during the exegesis of Nebuchednezzar's dream and Joseph's

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angels and demons fought for his soul, St Fursy was burnt on his shoulder and jaw, and these marks were still visible once he returned to his senses. At other times relics can be originated from a vision as is the case of an abbot's vision of a monk recently dead, who wishes to leave a testimony of his apparition: he kicks the wooden platform where the monks sing, and a relic is formed. A final instance rich of revealing elements is the narration of a Dominican monk. The mime Zalchart sees the apparition of a blacksmith recently dead who takes him on his horse to a mountain and shows him the otherworld where the dead suffer their punishments, and give him communications to the living. As a sign of authenticity of his vision, Zalchart receives two marks on his neck. Once back they become infected and he dies, see Le Goff, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, pp. 127, 349, 364 respectively. This echoes *Le livre de la Fontaine amoureuse* where in wakefulness the dreamer finds the ring his beloved had given him in the dream. The blacksmith riding a horse heading to a mountain represents clear traditional elements of the shaman's journey to the beyond, see M. Eliade, *Lo sciamanesimo*, pp. 495-504 on horses and blacksmiths, p. 290 on the mountain, see ch. 2. Also Curma, the protagonist of a dream reported by Augustine, is a blacksmith, see above p. 12, note 55. For other instances of narrations containing elements that from the vision remain in reality, see A. Joynes ed., *Medieval Ghost Stories: an Anthology of Miracles, Marvels and Prodigies*, Woodbridge, Rochester, NY, Boydell Press, 2001, pp. 37-8, 40-1, 60-1. On memory, see also ch. 2, p. 118.

<sup>232</sup> *Benjamin. Major*, 5, 1, PL 196, col. 169.

<sup>233</sup> *De erud.*, lib I, 20, PL 196, col. 1264.

<sup>234</sup> 'Nam Scriptura Sacra saepe unum dicit, et aliud innuit' [Often the Scripture says one thing and hints at something else], *De erud.*, 1, 1, PL 196, col. 1231. See also the masters of the Talmud who paralleled the interpretation of dreams and of language, note 252 below.

interpretation. As in dreams the bodily senses are asleep, we can have an insight of what is seen through *excessus mentis*.<sup>235</sup> The association of dream and contemplation is reiterated during the interpretation of the king's second dream (*Dan.* 4): through dreams, *alienatio* of mind can be attained. Further, 'having a dream signifies to enter with the mind the mystery of divine contemplation and he who falls asleep and sees a dream is the one who ascends to the contemplation of sublime things by means of *excessus mentis*'.<sup>236</sup>

The correspondence between dreams and contemplation is also developed in *Adnotatiunculae in Joelem* within a tripartite system: vision corresponds to self-knowledge; dreams to *excessus animi*, and *prophetia* to the contemplation of the spouse.<sup>237</sup> Each is subdivided into three types ranging from physical related phenomena to the access of future knowledge.<sup>238</sup> In commenting upon the technical terms *excessus mentis*, *alienatio mentis*, and *extasis*, Dumeige remarks that Richard describes *excessus mentis* as *alienatio mentis*. They refer to the overcoming of the senses,

<sup>235</sup> 'Quia per somnium sopitur sensus corporeus, recte per illum mentis excessum intelligimus, et per somnium, ea quae per mentis excessum videmus', [The bodily senses are asleep during the dream, by which we understand rightly ecstasy, and through the dream we understand those things that we see through *excessus mentis*], *De erud.*, 1, 19, PL 196, col. 1261. Apparently Richard indicates that by means of the term 'dream' it is meant '*excessus mentis*'.

<sup>236</sup> 'Somnium autem videre, est in divinae contemplationis arcanum mente transire. Dormit itaque et somnium videt qui per mentis excessum in sublimium contemplationem ascendit', *De erud.* 2, 1, PL 196, col. 1300. Richard has just explained that the king being tranquil at home and glad in his palace means that his conscience is tranquil, his palace symbolising its security, PL 196, col. 1299.

<sup>237</sup> *Adnotatiunculae elucidatoriae in Joelem prophetam*, PL 175, col. 357.

<sup>238</sup> Of the three types of dreams, the first is false, as it occurs before digestion; as the second takes place when the soul starts to be purified, it is possible to see some light. Yet, this dream partially contains some falsity. The third occurs after digestion when the soul is purified, therefore the brightness of truth, 'veritatis splendor', is achieved, *Adnot. in Joelem*, PL 175, col. 356. Visions are differentiated in material, spiritual and intellectual, *Adnot. in Joelem*, PL 175, col. 355; see also *In apocalypsim Joannis libri septem*, PL 196, cols. 686-87. There while defining what kind of vision John was bestowed in the *Apocalypse*, Richard identifies two kinds of revelation: *theophania*, divine apparitions that sometimes are displayed through signs. The second type occurs through anagogy, the ascending of the mind towards superior things contemplated in a pure way, *In apocalypsim*, PL 196, col. 687.

Prophecy is first defined and then three kinds are identified. Prophecy, namely divine inspiration that foretells, 'pronuntians', unknown events, can be admirable, dual, and humble, *admirabilis*, *anceps* or *humilis*. *Humilis* concerns what is next and known, 'proximo et noto'; *anceps* considers what is next but unknown; *admirabilis* illustrates what is hidden and not known, *Adnot. in Joelem*, PL 175, col. 356.

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and to the failure of reason which leaves the place to intelligence.<sup>239</sup> *Alienatio* is essential to attain the rapture, and the soul's accessing the divine reality during this mode of contemplation is not due to human will or effort. *Extasis* is not frequently employed by Richard, in contrast *somnium*, and *sopor* are used as equivalents of *excessus mentis*.<sup>240</sup> It is evident that dreams need interpretation, as in the Bible. Further, the oneiric state recalls the contemplative one, and when the term 'dream' is employed it can stand for *excessus mentis*.

### Bonaventure

Although the process of synthesis of Aristotle's works and the Christian doctrine commenced by Albert and completed by Thomas is pivotal, one should not undervalue the other currents of thought that were active at the time. In particular Augustinianism was still vital.<sup>241</sup> Bonaventure (1221-1274) ought to be recalled as representing the Augustinian tradition, albeit renewed precisely through the Aristotelian works.<sup>242</sup> In the thirteenth century also Scholastic philosophers are familiar with the Aristotelian works. Bonaventure is no exception, and accepts those elements of Aristotle's thought that can be grafted onto Augustinian's doctrine.<sup>243</sup> He follows Augustine in distinguishing between faith and reason, thus delimiting the provinces of theology and philosophy.<sup>244</sup> As regards dreams, Bonaventure identifies five causes: 'the disposition of the body, the anxiety of the mind, diabolic illusions,

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<sup>239</sup> Dumeige, p. 144, n. 1.

<sup>240</sup> Dumeige, p. 144, n. 1.

<sup>241</sup> On the wealth of currents of thoughts, see Copleston, pp. 215 ff. Dinzelbacher remarks that a new religious sensitivity was born in the twelfth century and was expressed by mysticism, and that if a 'history of emotions' was made 'the turning point... must be located in this century', 'The Beginnings of Mysticism Experienced in Twelfth-Century England', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium IV: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1987*, ed. M. Glasscoe, Cambridge, Brewer, 1987, pp. 111-131, p. 126.

<sup>242</sup> On a discussion on Bonaventure's inclusion within philosophers, see Copleston, pp. 245 ff.

<sup>243</sup> Abbagnano, vol. 2, pp. 133-4. Bonaventure's was a 'modern Augustinianism [...] developed through the centuries and re-thought in relation to Aristotle', Copleston, p. 245.

<sup>244</sup> Copleston, p. 245.

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angelic revelations, and divine visitations'.<sup>245</sup> Although it appears that Bonaventure draws upon Gregory's classification, the anxiety of the mind is not combined with illusion as in Gregory's classification. Bonaventure maintains that the last two types are true signs.<sup>246</sup> In his mystical research he is influenced by the Victorines,<sup>247</sup> and his voice resounds more similar to a mystic than to a philosopher. The soul ascends to God along six degrees. However, the real mystical ascesis can only be achieved through the seventh degree, when reasoning and all intellectual faculties are abandoned in order to attain the highest mystical stage, in which '*mysticum*' signifies 'secret', known only by those who desire achieving it.<sup>248</sup> Bonaventure compares *excessus mentis* to the state of *docta ignorantia* achieved when the human soul is ravished above itself in darkness.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> '[Qu]inque de causis fiunt somnia. Quaedam contingunt ex *dispositione corporis*, quaedam ex *sollicitudine mentis*, quaedam ex *illusione diabolica*, quaedam ex *revelatione angelica*, quaedam ex *visitatione divina*', Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, II, Bk. 2, dist. 7, part 2, art. 1, question 3 <<http://www.franciscan-archive.org/bonaventura/opera/bon02194.html>> [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2010]. See also Kruger, p. 190 n. 35. On the meaning of 'visitatio' as inspired dream as opposed to 'phantasiae', vain dreams, see Dulaey, p. 111.

<sup>246</sup> 'Somnia vero, quae ab *Angelis bonis*, aut *a Deo* sunt in nobis, signa sunt vera' [The dreams that are in us either by the good Angels or by God are true signs] <<http://www.franciscan-archive.org/bonaventura/opera/bon02194.html>>

<sup>247</sup> Abbagnano, p. 148.

<sup>248</sup> 'In hoc autem transitu, si sit perfectus, oportet quod relinquatur omnes intellectuales operationes, et apex affectus totus transferatur et transformetur in Deum. Hoc autem est mysticum et secretissimum, quod *nemo novit, nisi qui accipit*, nec accipit nisi qui desiderat, nec desiderat nisi quem ignis Spiritus sancti medullitus inflamat', *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, <http://www.franciscanos.net/document/itinerl.htm> [accessed December 2010] [In this passing over, if it is to be perfect, all intellectual activities must be left behind and the height of our affection must be totally transferred and transformed into God. This, however, is mystical and most secret, which no one knows except him who receives it, no one receives except him who desires it, and no one desires except him who is inflamed in his very marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit], Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, trans. E. Cousins, New York, Paulist Press, 1978, p. 113.

<sup>249</sup> Abbagnano, p. 150. In passing, it is worth recalling that before Bonaventure and the Victorines the mystical ascesis differentiated into three degrees, the highest of which is *excessus mentis*, was put forward by St Bernard (1090-1153). Consideration represents the first degree, contemplation constitutes the second, and the highest is ecstasy or *excessus mentis*, see Abbagnano, p. 5.

## Maimonides

Both Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas refer to the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1135-1204).<sup>250</sup> Prophecy is the central reflection in his works,<sup>251</sup> and he is representative of Jewish thought, as within Jewish culture dreams are closely related to prophecy.<sup>252</sup> In his *Guide for the Perplexed* Maimonides aims to conciliate the Bible with philosophy, revelation with reason;<sup>253</sup> his aim within Jewish thought can be paralleled to what Albert and Thomas did for Christian philosophy.<sup>254</sup> Maimonides identifies three degrees of knowledge: imagination, 'science and scientific intellect', and finally the highest degree of the imaginative intellect, or prophecy, which unites the first two and leads to the understanding of the essence of things.<sup>255</sup>

A number of questions that have been seen so far are tackled, including the conditions required by a prophet in order to receive a prophecy: preparation and study, purity of mind (ch. 36), and some intuition and courage (ch. 38), the last one recalling the 'audacia' mentioned by Vincent (see p. 39). Dreams and prophecy are similar experiences because the faculty of imagination is the same during sleep and during prophecy, their difference being the different level of development: dream is compared to an unripe fruit, while prophecy is the same fruit that has achieved ripeness (ch. 36). His comment on prophecy, dreams and visions is centred in the analysis of the Biblical phrase: 'In a vision I make myself known to him, in a dream I

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<sup>250</sup> Thorndike, p. 207; L. Roth, *The Guide for the Perplexed: Moses Maimonides*, London, Hutchinson's University Library, 1948, p. 85. The version consulted is Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer, Forgotten Books, 1956.

<sup>251</sup> Roth, *The Guide*, p. 12.

<sup>252</sup> F. Michelini Tocci, 'I sogni nella cultura ebraica medievale', in *I sogni nel Medio Evo*, Gregory ed., pp. 261-290, p. 275. Michelini Tocci also maintains that the rules employed by the Talmud masters to interpret dreams were the same as the ones applied for the hermeneutic of the Scripture, that is to say dreams underwent a similar analysis as the language, p. 285.

<sup>253</sup> Abbagnano, vol. 2, p. 99.

<sup>254</sup> Thorndike, vol. II, p. 207.

<sup>255</sup> Roth, p. 66.

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will speak to him'.<sup>256</sup> Maimonides states that there are only two modes of revelation, as mentioned in the Bible, dreams and visions, and that there are no differences in meaning of the two terms, as they both originate in a root signifying 'to see' (ch. 43). A prophecy occurs in dreams and Maimonides reiterates that a prophet does not need to specify that his revelation took place in a dream or in a vision, as this is the only way it can occur (chs. 41, 42). Before illustrating the degrees of prophecy, the biblical expression 'in a vision' is explained as signifying 'prophetic vision', 'the hand of God' and 'a vision' (ch. 41). This is a fearful experience occurring in waking, recognisable by the following physical signs: the prophet trembles, he has no strength and then he falls in a 'deep sleep' (ch. 41).

Prophecy has eleven degrees. The first two are not of the same kind as the ones referred to in the Biblical phrase 'In a vision I make myself known to him, in a dream I will speak to him' (*Num.* 12, 6). When the prophet realises that he receives a prophecy, he does not define it as a dream but rather a prophecy (ch. 45). The first degree is represented by the presence of the spirit of God, whereas in the second – epitomised by David and Solomon – the person is bestowed a certain force that urges him to speak, 'to compose hymns' or 'to treat science'. With the third degree one enters the level of prophetic vision, albeit the lowest, whereby the prophet sees an allegory which is interpreted in the dream itself. In the fourth degree the prophet hears a voice without seeing the speaker, while in the fifth a person speaks to him. In the sixth and in the seventh respectively an Angel and God speak to the prophet. The degrees from the eighth to the eleventh represent prophetic dreams and reiterate the first ones in the same order: the prophet sees something allegorical; hears words; sees a man; and finally in the eleventh he sees an angel who speaks to him. In the

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<sup>256</sup> *Numbers*, 12, 6.

highest degree of this series, it is improbable that a prophet could see God. This is how Maimonides comments on the biblical phrase: 'In a vision I make myself known to him, in a dream I will speak to him'. In only one kind of oneiric phenomenon God makes himself known, whereas in the other one he simply speaks. Dream is related to speaking, while vision to the intellect (ch. 45).

#### **4. Tertiary Literature: Dreambooks**

The tradition of dreambooks dates back to Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica*.<sup>257</sup> After illustrating his dream classification, and specifying the qualities required to be a dream interpreter, the importance of time, and the presence of good or bad signs, Artemidorus lists the possible contents of dreams with the relative interpretations.<sup>258</sup> The popularity of dreambooks in the Middle Ages is evidenced by the high number of manuscripts containing such works and the different types available.<sup>259</sup> The first kind is the 'dream chancebook' or 'dream alphabet',<sup>260</sup> the second is the 'lunar dreambook' and the last one is the 'dreambook proper'.<sup>261</sup> 'Dream chancebooks' provide interpretation for a dream on a random basis, by associating the dream to a letter of the alphabet. The 'lunar dreambook', was based on the phase of the moon during which the dream took place. Finally the 'dreambook proper' associates the content of the dream to a fixed meaning. To remain within the boundaries of

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<sup>257</sup> As regards to the ancient eastern origins of dreambooks, see Fischer, p. 6. See also Franco Michelini Tocci, 'I sogni nella cultura ebraica medievale', p. 284.

<sup>258</sup> Another important work on dream interpretation is Achmet's (820 C.E.) which constitutes the framework of Pascalis Romanus' *Liber Thesaurii Occulti*, see Collin-Roset, p. 133.

<sup>259</sup> Kruger, pp. 7-11.

<sup>260</sup> The method consists in associating the dream significance with a letter of the alphabet. The dreamer opens a book randomly and interprets the dream according to the first letter of the page, Kruger, p. 10. This method recalls Augustine's conversion: he hears a child inciting him to read. Augustine opens the Bible randomly and interprets the passage he finds as a sign to follow, see *Conf.*, VIII, 12. 29. The method also recalls Francis of Assisi who opened the Bible randomly three times, and applied the teaching found to his life and order, see *I Fioretti di San Francesco e le considerazioni delle stimmate*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1957, p. 10.

<sup>261</sup> Fischer, p. 7; H. Phillips, 'Dreams and Dream Lore', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, ed. S. Fein, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2000, p. 243; Kruger, pp. 8-9.

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Christian orthodoxy sometimes this kind of book is defined as the *Sompnile Joseph* or *Somniale Danielis*,<sup>262</sup> and prayers are included, as well as the suggestion that the book to be consulted should be the Bible, in the case of dream alphabet dreambooks.<sup>263</sup>

These strategies are not sufficient to make dreambooks and dream interpretation accepted by the Church and by the law.<sup>264</sup> The discourse of dreambooks involves and overlaps with knowledge. The attempt to foreknow the future clashes against the principle according to which hidden knowledge of the human events and their deep meaning only belongs to God. Further, random association of dream images and future events rules out the possibility of any human contribution to decision making,<sup>265</sup> thus involving the question of human free will.<sup>266</sup> John of Salisbury attacks dreambooks, although he is not completely against a theory on dreams, as has been seen above (see p. 27).<sup>267</sup> He argues that neither Joseph nor Daniel would have written those works, emphasising that both prophets were able to interpret dreams by means of divine inspiration.<sup>268</sup>

John of Salisbury does not represent the only case of ambivalence towards dream interpretation, when it becomes close to divination by dreams. The Bible offers opposing views on dreams: dream observation is put beside consulting soothsayers, wizards, charmers, fortune tellers<sup>269</sup> as opposed to the prophetic tradition dating back to Joseph and Daniel. Differentiating dream interpretation from divination by dreams means defining the boundary between practices that are acceptable from

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<sup>262</sup> Kruger, pp. 9-10. See also Thorndike, vol. 2, pp. 292 ff.

<sup>263</sup> Kruger, p. 9.

<sup>264</sup> Kruger, pp. 11 ff.

<sup>265</sup> Kruger, p. 9.

<sup>266</sup> See Gregory, p. 118.

<sup>267</sup> Gregory, p. 116.

<sup>268</sup> Thorndike, vol. 2, pp. 162-3; 292.

<sup>269</sup> *Deuteronomy*, 18; 9-12. For other passages on dreams from the Bible, see Kruger, p. 168 n. 2.



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those to be rooted out. This involves stepping into the field of knowledge, which means establishing and preserving the supremacy, the authority (in the medieval sense of the term) on the religious field, as well as opposing to and fighting any hint of unorthodoxy arising both from the pagan tradition and later from heresies.

When it comes to dreambooks it is not a matter of classifying dreams, but rather of practising divination to foreknow the future. One could assume that it implies the domain concerning the popular tradition as opposed to philosophical theories, and to religious doctrine, that are being set forward in the twelfth century, thus opposing low to high culture. However, dreambooks are addressed to different kinds of audience – including learned, aristocratic and even clerical.<sup>270</sup>

The situation is dissimilar when the philosophical context is considered. On the one hand Boethius of Dacia's attitude is unambiguous in distinguishing between science founded on reason and divination. He has no doubts in leaving outside the field of science any theory based on the position of the moon, of the sun and any tradition based on the authority of the ancient 'magi', which was based on metaphors.<sup>271</sup> On the other hand Albert the Great maintains that the knowledge of future things through dreams is a datum of experience and that oneiromancy is 'eruditio naturalis' which interweaves with other disciplines.<sup>272</sup> Therefore Albert accepts the attitude of interpreting signs and metaphors to acquire knowledge.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Kruger, pp. 14-15.

<sup>271</sup> G. Fioravanti, 'La 'scientia somnialis' di Boezio di Dacia'. *Atti della Accademia delle Scienze di Torino: II. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* IOI (1966-67), pp. 329-69, p. 340; see also Gregory, pp. 143-144.

<sup>272</sup> Fioravanti, p. 353.

<sup>273</sup> On Albert the Great's view concerning the interconnection of astronomy, oneiromancy and 'magical' sciences, see Gregory, pp. 146 ff.

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As the modern reader might miss the association between dream content and its interpretation, medieval dreambooks could represent an invaluable resource. The presence – or the absence – of a dream in the dreambooks implies a certain frequency of that image and a correspondent relevance of a particular dream at that time. Medieval dreambooks constitute the ‘world of the oneiric experience of an epoch’.<sup>274</sup> As Fischer remarks, dreambooks provide a sourcebook of medieval imagery, psychology as well as a sourcebook for interpreting literary dreams.<sup>275</sup> However, it should be noted that there is not any connection between dreambooks content and reference to theories of dream classification,<sup>276</sup> nor any connections between them and dream classifications referred to in literary texts.<sup>277</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Albeit far from being exhaustive, the present overview offers a number of issues that deserve underscoring. During the twelfth century dream interpretation becomes part of medieval scientific, philosophical and theological debate. The gamut of classifications and the popularity of dreambooks witness how widespread was the concern about dreams throughout social classes and doctrines.

The diffusion of Christianity constitutes a watershed as well as continuity with Antiquity. Every pivotal moment in the course of human (western) history is not a sudden break with the past. During the first centuries of the new era, thoughts of classical antiquity and elements of tradition were preserved and combined with the

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<sup>274</sup> G. Guidorizzi, ‘L’interpretazione dei sogni nel mondo tardoantico: oralità e scrittura’, in *I sogni nel Medio Evo*, Gregory ed., p. 169. On the correspondence between dreams and culture, see Dodds, *I Greci e l’irrazionale*, pp. 119 ff.

<sup>275</sup> Fischer, pp. 8 ff.

<sup>276</sup> Kruger, pp. 14–15.

<sup>277</sup> Phillips, ‘Dreams and Dream Lore’, p. 246.

emerging religion.<sup>278</sup> As C. S. Lewis remarked, the fact that the thinkers of the first centuries had to react to the new culture had a reinvigorating effect.<sup>279</sup> Artemidorus's fivefold classification was handed down via Macrobius's work to the Middle Ages, even with only minor changes. Generally speaking, dreams were already distinguished on the basis of physical causes (usually meaningless dreams, not worth interpreting) and spiritual ones, as is the case of *somnium*, visions, oracles, and the combination of them, as in the *Somnium Scipionis*. *Visio* takes on a religious connotation and provides two further categories: revelation and prophecy, which in their turn undergo further subcategorisation, as Vincent of Beauvais reports. Revelation appears to be a typically Christian category acknowledged principally thanks to Augustine's reflection, although the kernel of revelatory dreams is found in Tertullian's and Calcidius's classifications. Apparently Macrobius's *oraculum* becomes part of the broader category of *visio*. In particular, two of its aspects are retained in the prophetic vision: the idea of announcing the truth conveyed by the verb 'denuntiare', and secondly the appearance of authoritative figures – including human figures, angels and God. Angels lead into the world of spirits. This invisible world was not dismissed by classical antiquity. Christian writers in the first centuries and later Christian authority aim to define it and differentiate within it – treacherous as invisible it can be – good and bad forces.<sup>280</sup> Angels, as good spirits, intervene in divinely inspired dreams or visions.<sup>281</sup> Opposed to *revelatio*, bestowed by means of good spirits, stands *illusio*, caused by evil spirits, which take on the form of the devil. A pure and cleansed soul is more likely to have good dreams, or in other words, behaving in conformity to the Christian moral teaching has the effect to keep the evil spirits and the danger of

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<sup>278</sup> See Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, ch. 1, pp. 30-31. See also Dulaey, pp. 34, 134.

<sup>279</sup> Lewis, *Discarded Image*, p. 48.

<sup>280</sup> For a discussion on demons, spirits and angels in antiquity, see Dulaey, pp. 113 ff. See also Lewis, *Discarded Image*, pp. 40-42, and Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, pp. 17, 37 ff.

<sup>281</sup> Dulaey, pp. 116-7.

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devilish temptations at bay. The close link between pure daily life and dreams is set forth by Hildegard and Richard of St Victor, for instance.<sup>282</sup>

The reflection upon good and evil involves the debate on truth versus falsehood and consequently on knowledge. The religious authority aimed at a twofold task: educating people so that they would follow their teachings – the *exempla* offered by the saints' lives were very useful to this purpose;<sup>283</sup> secondly defining the boundaries of good and evil, truth versus falsehood, and above all establishing who was in the position to differentiate between good and evil spirits, true revelations as opposed to deceptive 'illusions'. Dreams are a democratic activity, bestowed on everyone, that cannot be prohibited, as Synesius (373-414) remarks.<sup>284</sup> While wonderful events, *mirabilia*, as revelatory dreams, cannot be stopped from occurring even to humble, uneducated people, the Church can still act in different directions: prohibiting divination through dreams together with other practices of divination; appointing the right to discriminate divine revelations from diabolic 'illusions' to the saints, as they possess a certain sensibility, 'taste', 'sapore', which is not common to everyone.<sup>285</sup>

The focus being the realm of uncontrollable spirits, defining the borders between true or false knowledge must be as exhaustive as possible of every aspect of life. Divination, and divination by dreams, falls into the forbidden area of human activity. Since the early Christian period, divination has been considered to be dominated by

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<sup>282</sup> Quality of life and dreams were related also in the classical antiquity. See Dulaey, pp. 101; 136-7.

<sup>283</sup> Le Goff, 'Les rêves', pp. 304-5.

<sup>284</sup> Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, p. 38. See also Hildegard who maintains that dreams are common human phenomena, see above p. 21.

<sup>285</sup> In the course of time the authoritative power turned out to be a potent tool which could be deployed to fight against heresies. Evidence of this authority is the fact that mystics, particularly women mystics, have to be examined by the competent religious representative in order to be authorised to continue disseminating the content of their visions, E. A. Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 20; see also Kruger, p. 15.

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evil spirits and deceptive dreams to be originated by the devil.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, the aim of divination is to foreknow the future, whereas it is viewed that this knowledge only pertains to God. If some future events are disclosed by means of revelation to prophets, it is only by divine will. Wishing to foreknow the future signifies trespassing the borders between human limits and divine will. Gregory the Great warned against divination and wizards (see p. 17); John of Salisbury attacks divination and dreambooks (see p. 54);<sup>287</sup> Thomas includes questions concerning divination and superstition in his system categorising natural and supernatural phenomena. One could wonder, though, how successful these warnings had been, given the popularity of medieval dreambooks in the following centuries.

For mystics as well as for the Church authority, the highest and true knowledge derives from revelation and contemplation, the highest degree of which is *excessus mentis* or ecstasy. This should not be considered a new phenomenon; as it derives from the classical Greek world, but it is not exclusive of western civilisation (see following chapter).<sup>288</sup> The concept of ecstasy has been transformed so that it conforms to the principles of the new religion. At the same time as the theological reflection takes place, the consideration of the knowledge acquired through senses and experience was not neglected. The works by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas represent the synthesis of the knowledge originating from the senses and reason, with truth yielded through revelation, rapture and prophecy, thus blending Aristotelianism with the Christian doctrine.

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<sup>286</sup> Dulaey, pp.129 ff.

<sup>287</sup> Thomdike, vol. 2, pp. 162-3; 293.

<sup>288</sup> The wide gamut of narrations relating voyages of the soul into the beyond originate from a substrate of a shamanic tradition, see J. C. Schmitt, 'Rêver au XII siècle', in *I sogni nel Medio Evo*, Gregory ed., pp. 291-316, p. 314.

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Two more aspects remain to be foregrounded. The first is the medieval belief that knowledge can be attained through interpretation. The whole creation, God's book, the Holy Scriptures, and oneiric phenomena had to be interpreted in order to be understood. In addition to being deemed as concrete reality and therefore studied according to the *littera*, the world is analysed according to the symbolic language.<sup>289</sup>

Richard points out that in the Bible a literal meaning together with a symbolic one can be identified.<sup>290</sup> Symbol is defined as 'a collection of visible forms in order to illustrate the invisible ones'.<sup>291</sup> It is by means of symbols that it is possible to achieve the knowledge of unknown things. The hidden knowledge is attained through what is known, 'ignota per cognita noscere'.<sup>292</sup> The influence of the interpretative process applied to biblical images as well as to oneiric phenomena and to the world as a divine book is crucial in the process of comprehending the words of the medieval mystics and poets (see Part II).

The last aspect concerns the relationship between dreams and *excessus mentis*. The classifications illustrated in this chapter demonstrate the wide gamut of states during which the oneiric phenomena can occur. While dreams usually occur during sleep, there are phenomena, including visions, prophecy, and *excessus mentis*, ecstasy, which can be experienced during waking or illnesses. Illness is a state when the physical body is nearer to death than to sleep, although the soul has not been separated from the body yet. As Aristotle before him, Augustine notices that visions may happen also in the state of illness, and that dreams and visions ill people (usually defined as phrenetics) have, are similar. However, *excessus mentis* is not only a waking

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<sup>289</sup> R. Manselli, 'Il sogno come premonizione, consiglio e predizione nella tradizione medievale', in *I sogni nel Medio Evo*, Gregory ed., pp. 219-244, p. 226. On the significance of the Symbol see also Le Goff, *La società dell'occidente medievale*, Torino, Einaudi, 1983, pp. 354-5.

<sup>290</sup> *De erud.* I, 1, PL 196, col. 1231. See above p. 34 n. 169.

<sup>291</sup> '[C]ollectio formarum visibilium ad invisibilium demonstrationem', Richard of St Victor, *In apocalypsim Joannis*, I, 1, PL 196, col. 687.

<sup>292</sup> Richard of St Victor, *In apocalypsim Joannis*, I, 1, PL 196, col. 688.

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phenomenon, as it can occur during a 'dream'. The highest degree of *alienatio* is compared to a 'dream', an oneiric state. When referring to *alienatio*, Richard of St Victor employs the term 'somnia'. He interprets Nebuchednezzar's dream as an instance of *excessus mentis*. As Richard explains, to see a dream signifies to enter contemplation (see p. 48). Dreams share the same nature as *excessus mentis*, thus belonging to a state of consciousness other than ordinary. When relating their ecstatic experience in human terms, also the mystics compare it to a dream (see the following chapter).

Is it possible to apply this exegesis to the medieval dream visions? Why do dreambooks not contribute to the understanding of medieval dream visions? Can the literary 'dream' – at the outset of medieval dream visions – signify that the poets were in a different state of consciousness, whereby they could attain poetic inspiration? And do poets wish to convey the significance that the inspirational state shares some fundamental features with the ecstatic, mystical state of contemplation? Before moving on to investigate and answer these questions in Part II, the mystical experience of the Middle English mystics will be examined.

## Chapter 2 – Mysticism

The previous chapter explored how dreams were integrated within medieval culture, forming a rung of the ladder towards true knowledge, which was attainable through transitional states of consciousness including prophetic ecstasy, *raptus*, *excessus mentis*, and contemplation. All terms correspond to a state experienced by mystics and prophets.

It is a recurring pattern in studies concerning mysticism to commence the analysis by first defining 'mystic' and the 'mystical experience', given that the debate is wide and ongoing. The definitions are as many as there are perspectives, and the debate involves clarifying also a number of other terms employed in the discussion. Although to define what mysticism and the mystical experience are is beyond the scope of the present study, it is appropriate to outline briefly what lies in the background of the discussion on mysticism. The first part of the chapter outlines the theoretical aspect of the discussion, addressing issues arising from the employment of technical terms including mysticism, consciousness, and reality. The second part introduces the more practical experiential aspect of the debate, and also an anthropological perspective, by considering the mystical ecstasy diachronically and cross-culturally.<sup>1</sup> The last part explores the mystics' ecstasy through analysis of their texts. As the final focus of the research is the analysis of Chaucer's dream visions from a mystical perspective, choice has focussed on works by the Middle English mystics. This contributes to contextualising the mystical cultural intertext that can have influenced Chaucer's writing.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Le Goff remarks that a study from the anthropological perspective on dreams and visions would be fruitful and revealing, see J. Le Goff, 'Les rêves dans la culture et la psychologie collective del l'Occident médiéval', in *Pour un autre Moyen Age: temps, travail et culture en Occident, 18 essais*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977, p. 303.



## 1. *Mysticism, Mystics, and the Mystical Experience*

The concept of mysticism is a relatively recent one, probably as recent as our century.<sup>2</sup> The term 'mysticism' originates in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, being first formed in French as 'la mystique'.<sup>3</sup> The term derives from Greek μύσσης, 'mysterious, occult',<sup>4</sup> related to the verb μύειν, 'to close' (the lips or the eyes); 'to be silent', a mystic is 'a person vowed to keep silence'. The *Mystical Theology* commences by acknowledging that 'De pryue þinges of deuinytee ben kouerid and hid vnder þe souereyn-shinyng derknes of wisest silence',<sup>5</sup> in accordance with St Paul's statement: 'there are words which are not allowed to utter'.<sup>6</sup>

McGinn identifies three fields of study concerning theology and philosophy of religion: theological, philosophical, and comparativist and psychological approaches to mysticism.<sup>7</sup> He underscores that 'no mystics (at least before the present century)

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<sup>2</sup> D. Turner, *The Darkness of God. Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> B. McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism*, 2 vols., I, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, New York, Crossroad, 1991, p. xvi. McGinn points out that it was preceded by the expression 'mystical theology' more than a millennium before, p. xiv. The word derives from Pseudo-Denis's treatise *Theologia Mystica*, indicating 'the secret knowledge of God', see Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, London, Burns & Oates, 1961, p. 2. For an extensive history of the meaning of 'mystic' see Knowles, *The English Mystics*, London, Burns & Oates, 1927, pp. 2 ff.; for examples of the wider meanings attributed to 'mysticism' outside the Catholic field, see *ibid.* pp. 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> OED, entry 'mystic'. P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots*, Paris, Éditions Klincksieck, 1968-1980, 'μύω', p. 728.

<sup>5</sup> *Deonise Hid Diuinite*, in *The Cloud of Unknowing: and Related Treatises on Contemplative Prayer*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson, Exeter, Catholic Records Press, 1982, p. 119. 'The secret matters of theology are concealed and hidden under the transcendently shining darkness of wisest silence', *The Mystical Theology of St Denis*, in *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, A. C. Spearing trans., London, Penguin, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> 2 *Corinthians*, 12, 1-4.

<sup>7</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God*, Appendix, pp. 265 ff.. Among the names McGinn recalls within the theological approach: Inge (1860-1954), E. Underhill (1875-1941), C. Butler (1858-1934), and D. Knowles (1896-1974); within the philosophical approach W.T. Stace (1886-1967), and N. Smart (1927-2001); within the comparativist and psychological approach he includes R. Otto (1896-1937), and M. Eliade (1907-1986); W. James (1842-1910), J. H. Leuba (1868-1946), S. Freud (1856-1939), C. G. Jung (1875-1961), E. Neumann (1905-1960). J. Kroll and B. Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics*, Routledge, New York and London, 2005, address the perspective from psychology and neurophysiology; M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory. A History of Theories of Culture*, New York, Oxford, Altamira Press, 1968 deals with anthropology and recalls Tylor (1832-1917) and his *Primitive Culture* (1871), J. Frazer's (1854-1941) *The Golden Bough* (1890; 1906-15), B. Malinowski (1884-1942); in France L. Lévi-Bruhl (1857-1939), E. Durkheim (1858-1917), C. Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), finally the studies by N. K. Chadwick and H. M. Chadwick,

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believed in or practiced 'mysticism.' They believed in and practiced Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is, religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole'.<sup>8</sup>

As to the identification of the mystic, some scholars distinguish between the mystics who live the mystical moment and those who can theorise about it. Gardner points out two paths: 'science and experience', on the basis of the words by Richard of St Victor: 'Many know who this Benjamin is, some by science, others by experience'.<sup>9</sup> Knowles employs the terms 'mystic' and 'mystical' as in the period 'from the early middle ages to the sixteenth century'.<sup>10</sup> Mystics can be differentiated depending on

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*The Growth of Literature* and N.K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy* tie anthropology and literature. The second half of the twentieth century saw the development of the studies on the altered states of consciousness, see McGinn, pp. 340-43. In the 60s the debate was centred on experiments aimed at inducing ecstatic experiences by means of hallucinogens. The debate was started by Huxley's (1894-1963) *The Doors of Perception* (1954) where he maintained that he had attained the highest point of contemplation through the use of hallucinogens, see McGinn, p. 338; Kroll and Bachrach, p. 32. R. C. Zaehner's (1913-1974) *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (1957) is a reaction to Huxley's view. He emphasises the difference between nature mysticism and religious mysticism, and between experiences based on religion and induced by psychedelic drugs, see McGinn, pp. 338-9; Kroll and Bachrach, p. 32. The debate expands also within the area of philosophy of religion concerning whether or not the mystical experience is universally the same or it is influenced by culture and language, on the two views see Kroll and Bachrach, p. 228, n. 99. To return to literature and anthropology, in the late 1960's some American schools of poetry show interest in incantatory poetry (Charles Olson) and in the shamanic tradition of visionary and oneiric experiences (Robert Duncan). The writers of the Beat Generation, including Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder, were inspired by eastern literatures and religions and by mythology, see J. H. Leavitt, 'Poetics, Prophetics, Inspiration', in *Poetry and Prophecy: the Anthropology of Inspiration*, University of Michigan Press, 1997, pp. 1-60, p. 22. Given the multiplicity of perspectives and approaches to the phenomenon, as well as the variety of debates confronting specific issues within mysticism, this overview is far from being exhaustive.

<sup>8</sup> McGinn, vol. I, p. xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by E. G. Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics*, London, Dent, 1913, pp. 29, 3. '[A]lii per scientiam, alii per experientiam', *Benjamin minor*, I, PL 196, col. 0001. Benjamin represents contemplation; Richard acknowledges that some people can deal with the mystical experience from a theological, philosophical perspective, although they have not lived the divine union in their soul. On Richard on dreams and contemplation see ch. 1, p. 48. Gardner defines the mystic as 'one who thus conceives of religion as an experience of eternity; one who holds that the soul, even in this life, can unite herself with the Divine, and who believes in the possibility and the actuality of certain experiences in which the mind is brought into contact with what it believes to be God, and enjoys fruition of what takes as the ultimate reality', *Dante and the Mystics*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> D. Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, p. 2. For an extensive history of the meaning of 'mystic', see Knowles, *The English Mystics*, pp. 2 ff.; and for instances of the wider meanings attributed to 'mysticism' outside the Catholic field, see pp. 7-8. Knowles defines the mystics as 'those who describe, almost always from their own experience, a quite extraordinary state of union with God in prayer. In other words, they are those contemplatives who have reached what is called the Passive Union or some equivalent experience, or to whom some communication has been made. [...] and their language is technical', *The English Mystics*, 1927, pp. 19-20; Knowles defines the Union as Passive when the mystic perceives the revelation 'immediately' and it seems that 'they and their will are altogether

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how they became such and on the kind of grace they received.<sup>11</sup> Knowles distinguishes three groups of people within the medieval mystics: in addition to the mystics, he identifies 'analytic theologians' and 'spiritual directors'.<sup>12</sup> E. Underhill does not agree with the idea of a theoretical mystic, as the mystic is 'the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to *know about*, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real initiate'.<sup>13</sup> As to reality Underhill claims that the mystics 'distinguish clearly between the ineffable Reality which they perceive and the image under which they describe it',<sup>14</sup> and she draws a revealing parallel between mystical perception and artistic creativity.<sup>15</sup> More recent studies draw upon works of psychologists for their descriptions of mysticism and mystical union,<sup>16</sup> or address the

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passive', see *The English Mystics*, 1927, p. 32. Later Knowles remarks that 'mystic' is a synonym for 'contemplative', *The English Mystical Tradition*, 1961, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Some underwent the mystical experience at a very early stage in childhood, as opposed to others who became mystics after a long and troubled life devoted to the service. Secondly some mystics are 'inward-working', having received the gift of grace 'well-pleasing to God', rather than the grace through which they use the gifts to help other people. The gifts include healing, the gifts of tongues, prophecy and miracles, Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, 1961, pp. 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, 1961, p. 32. The 'analytic theologians' were concerned with the definition of the spiritual life and were to be found mainly among the Aristotelian theologians, whereas the 'spiritual directors' were engaged in giving instructions regarding the stages of the soul towards perfection, and devoted mainly to the monastic ascesis, Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, 1961, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> E. Underhill, *Mysticism*, London, Methuen, 1960, p. 72. Underhill emphasises the active element of mysticism, dismissing a 'passive and theoretical' side, as the mystics have always said 'not how they speculated, but how they acted', pp. 81, 83. If a definition of mysticism by Underhill is to be found, it could be the following: 'Mysticism, then, is not an opinion: it is not a philosophy. [...] It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God: the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man', p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> 'This intuition of the Real lying at the root of the visible world and sustaining it life, is present in a modified form in the arts: perhaps it were better to say, *must* be present if these arts are to justify themselves as heightened forms of experience', Underhill, p. 74.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance E. R. Dodds, who quotes studies by Stace and Zaehner. They agree in identifying two types of mystical experience: the extrovertive, which makes use of the senses, and the introvertive, which instead aims to exclude the use of senses, see *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965, pp. 79-80.

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area of mysticism from a gender perspective.<sup>17</sup> Related to the definition of the true mystics, is the issue concerning the canon of mystics.<sup>18</sup>

When addressing the mystical experience the debate involves a number of expressions which require clarification. The term 'experience' has been considered unsatisfactory. McGinn replaces it with 'consciousness',<sup>19</sup> which is 'a more precise and fruitful category than "experience"'.<sup>20</sup> However, 'consciousness' is a controversial term in the province of psychology. In effect not very much about consciousness is known, as 'the very existence as well as the nature of consciousness itself is fiercely debated'.<sup>21</sup> Further '[t]here is no single definition of consciousness upon which all workers in related disciplines can agree'.<sup>22</sup> Human consciousness is just about the

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<sup>17</sup> See for instance G. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995. She claims that mysticism is 'a social construction, and that it has been constructed in different ways at different times', p. 12. Gender-focused studies of (medieval) mysticism usually underline the relationship between knowledge and power, and stress that the cultural authority was male centred.

<sup>18</sup> Whether or not some authoritative figures of the past can be considered mystics is a subject of debate: St Augustine is not unanimously included among the mystics, see Knowles, *The English Mystics*, p. 13, n.1. Others are considered theoreticians, such as Hugh of St Victor, of whom Gardner says he founded 'the orthodox science of mysticism', p. 157. Richard of St Victor is considered a mystic by experience by Dante, whereas his writings do not convey the impression of experience according to Gardner, who in contrast deems that St Bernard and St Theresa certainly underwent the mystical experience and also wrote in a doctrinal way, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> McGinn criticises the use of the expression 'mystical experience', as it is ambiguous, given that many scholars do not engage in defining it, p. xvii. Furthermore, it appears to convey emphasis on a number of phenomena that, according to McGinn, are not key moments in the life of the mystics: these phenomena being 'altered states – visions, locutions, raptures, and the like', p. xvii. He finds the use of 'presence' 'a more central and more useful category for grasping the unifying note in the varieties of Christian mysticism'. 'Presence' and 'absence' are related to cataphatic and apophatic theological tradition, p. xviii.

<sup>20</sup> McGinn, p. xviii. R. K. Forman employs the term 'event', as 'it is not clear that a moment in which one is conscious without any mental content should be called an 'experience', 'Mystical Experience in the Cloud-Literature', in M. Glasscoe ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium IV: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1987*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1987, 177-194, p. 194, n. 19. He agrees with Steven Bernhardt who speaks of 'pure consciousness event'.

<sup>21</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, p. 9. Kroll and Bachrach remark that so far no single definition has exhausted all the aspects embraced by the concept of 'consciousness'. The definition that the two scientists choose is drawn upon the work by the psychiatrist Frank Fish: a 'state of awareness of the self and of the environment', quoted in Kroll and Bachrach, p. 37. A brief list of definitions can illustrate the point: "consciousness designates the common and generic feature of our psychic acts' [...] and Mercier [...] boldly proclaims [...] that 'consciousness is not susceptible of definition' for we can never go behind it or outside it', H. Ellis, *The World of Dreams*, London, Constable, 1926 [1911], p. 2, n. 2. "Consciousness' is not a straight forward scientific term. On the contrary, it belongs to a network of associated concepts that has evolved over centuries under the pressure of a host of cultural

last surviving mystery. A mystery is a phenomenon that people don't [sic] know how to think about – yet. [...] With consciousness we are still in a terrible muddle.<sup>23</sup>

Other terms have been scrutinised within the debate on the language apt to express mystical experience, including 'altered states of consciousness', 'ascetism',<sup>24</sup> 'reality', and 'ordinary state of consciousness', which is controversial and non-exhaustive, depending on which discipline applies them.<sup>25</sup> Other levels of consciousness, defined as 'altered states of consciousness', even though the means used to alter the state of consciousness are not drugs or hallucinogens, include sleep and dreams. Finally the altered state achieved through bodily penance or other means is defined 'trance'.<sup>26</sup>

At this stage it would appear that very little choice of terms has been left to the literary scholar. Although ineffability is undoubtedly an aspect of ecstasy, literary criticism still necessitates words to convey and share ideas. If confronting the area of mysticism involves defining every single pivotal term being employed, the task would

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influences – scientific, artistic, philosophical, and religious', A. Zeman, 'What in the World is Consciousness?', in S. Laureys ed., *The Boundaries of Consciousness: Neurobiology and Neuropathology*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 2005, pp. 1-10, p. 2. 'By 'consciousness' I simply mean those subjective states of sentience or awareness that begin when one awakes in the morning from a dreamless sleep and continue throughout the day until one goes to sleep at night, or falls into a coma, or dies, or otherwise becomes, as one would say, 'unconscious'', J. R. Searle, *Consciousness and Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> D. C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, London, The Penguin Press, 1991, pp. 21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Kroll and Bachrach argue that as to 'ascetism' there is not a definition that is agreed upon unanimously, p. 17; whereas 'altered state of consciousness' appears to be even more difficult than defining 'consciousness', p. 38. As to ascetism it should be specified whether the form of ascetism that is being explored encircles sacred as well as profane phenomena, and whether the ecstatic state has been achieved by means of hallucinogens or by other techniques, whether it has a religious foundation and meaning, and whether it is of Eastern or Western type, see Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 31-32, p. 204.

<sup>25</sup> Anthropologists emphasise that what can be defined as 'ordinary state' in the Western world does not apply to other cultures, where 'other cultures' refers to diachronic and cross-cultural discourse, Kroll and Bachrach, p. 223 n. 4. The issue of 'ordinary states' also relates to the debate on mental health, which is explored below. The concept of 'reality' is involved into the debate, in that for the mystics the ultimate reality is not in this physical world as it is perceived by the senses. Mystics assume the existence of another transcendent world, as real as the physical one, that can be accessed through the spiritual experience, see Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 48-50. For an exhaustive exploration of reality as indicating a wider concept other than just the tangible world perceived by the bodily senses, see C. Erickson, *The Medieval Vision, Essays in History and Perception*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1976, chs. 1, 2. Finally it has been noticed that the term 'mysticism' present a 'pejorative sense', and refers to 'experiences that are deemed to be beyond ready explanation', C. B. Davies, *Mysticism and Space: Space and Spatiality in the Works of Richard Rolle, The Cloud of Unknowing Author, and Julian of Norwich*, Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 40 ff.

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lead from one term to another, hence to the risk of immobilism from the very outset. Furthermore, the focus would be moved from the mystics' experience to an area that could be defined as mystical linguistics. Perhaps theoreticians of mysticism cannot agree on naming an event of which they do not have the knowledge. Conversely the true mystics have been successful in expressing it notwithstanding its ineffability. Only a true mystic could lead one out of the impending *impasse* created by language, and by systematisation of knowledge, even of the ineffable. As St Martin affirms: 'all mystics speak the same language, for they come from the same country'.<sup>27</sup>

Although aware of the debate underlying the terminology, the expression 'mystical experience' is employed in the present work, together with 'consciousness', and 'state of consciousness'. Further, the Middle English mystics' experience of their ascent to the divine, the recurring characteristics, and the several stages through which the soul attains the highest degree of contemplation, as identified by the mystics themselves, are explored in detail below.

Nonetheless before proceeding on to analyse the Middle English mystics' texts, it is essential to clarify briefly a few terms employed in the present section: religious, sacred, traditional, and primitive. When analysing the medieval mind, adjectives such as 'primitive' and 'uncivilised' are often found as a consequence of similarities drawn between the medieval and the pre-modern cultures.<sup>28</sup> Here these terms will be avoided as far as possible. The main reason relates to the negative connotation that these and similar terms convey. 'Uncivilised' points to a lack of civilisation and

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Underhill, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> For the juxtaposition of the medieval mind and the traditional societies see J. Le Goff, *La civiltà dell'occidente medievale*, Torino, Einaudi, 1983, pp. 360, 367-8. Further, Le Goff has emphasised the relevance of anthropological studies on the analysis of medieval dreams and visions, see 'Les rêves', pp. 300, 303. On the presence of folkloric elements in biblical dreams, see M. Dulaey, *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de Saint Augustin*, Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 1973, pp. 34-5, 201 ff.

implies ignorance – which is not the case. In contrast terms such as ‘religious’ or ‘sacred’, ‘traditional’ and ‘pre-modern’ are preferred.<sup>29</sup>

How can the terms ‘religious’ and ‘sacred’ be interpreted in the present context? The concept of ‘sacred’ was not simply an idea, but rather conceived as a terrible power long before the theological or philosophical concept of ‘god’ was coined.<sup>30</sup> The sacred is something that goes beyond the human experience and, as such, it is hardly communicable through words.<sup>31</sup> With regards to ‘religious’, it will not signify only ‘Christian’. Religious and sacred are used evoking Eliade’s concept of the ‘sacred’ – characterising the traditional pre-modern cultures – as opposed to ‘profane’, or ‘non-religious’ as the modern society is in contrast defined.<sup>32</sup> The sacred time and space is explored, as this enables a better understanding of the mystical experience, across different cultures, epochs and latitudes, including medieval mystics.

### ***Sacred Space and Time***

With regard to Space, the religious mind distinguishes between the space inhabited, that is to say the World or Cosmos – created by the gods – and Chaos. Communication with the gods, with the divine, usually identified with heaven, occurs in a spot located at the centre of the world through the *Axis mundi*. This is represented by a tree, a ladder – as Jacob’s ladder – a pillar (the latter being a pillar or

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<sup>29</sup> The term ‘civilisation’ is employed here in a neutral manner, and is referred to any culture. It is not used as ‘Western civilisation’ as opposed to the others, and it does not aim to convey a sense of superiority of one civilisation over another. In this sense it is applied as a synonym of ‘culture’.

<sup>30</sup> Otto quoted by Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1995, p.13.

<sup>31</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, pp. 15-16.

a tree with rungs), or by a mountain.<sup>33</sup> Being the place where the *Axis mundi* is situated, the centre is the point of interruption in the level of human state and the point where the true world is located.<sup>34</sup> Within the Cosmos, the temple interrupts the profane space. It usually has an opening at the top in order to allow the communication with the 'beyond', and has the function of a door through which the gods can descend to the earth and humans can symbolically ascend to heaven.<sup>35</sup> The houses of the traditional cultures are provided with a door to heaven for two reasons: firstly because the religious mind tends to live as close to its concept of reality – the centre of the world – as possible, secondly because the human world is built as a reflection of the Cosmos, thus forming a correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm.<sup>36</sup>

In these cultures the concept of Time recalls that of Space. From a modern, profane perspective, time is linear, based on historical past and present, formed by a beginning and an end, death. As opposed to linear time, sacred time is circular, as it does not elapse, but rather it can be re-experienced through rites.<sup>37</sup> As the temple embodies a breach in the level of Space, the religious rite within the temple represents the breach of profane passing of time.<sup>38</sup> The religious festivity is fundamental in traditional culture, as it enables to re-live a sacred event that occurred in a mythical past 'at the beginning' through rites.<sup>39</sup> A seminal consequence of considering time as circular is that Life comes from somewhere, not from this world,

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<sup>33</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 29. See also Eliade, *Lo sciamanesimo e le tecniche arcaiche dell'estasi*, Roma, Mediterranee, 2005, pp. 290 ff. On the World Tree in Northern mythology, see H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, London, Penguin 1984, [1964], pp. 26-7.

<sup>34</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 32. See also Eliade, *Lo sciamanesimo*, pp. 293 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>38</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 47.



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and leaves this world heading for somewhere beyond.<sup>40</sup> The close relation between sacred Space and sacred Time is revealed by the common etymology of the words ‘*templum*’ and ‘*tempus*’.<sup>41</sup> It is relevant to underline that mythical time, recalled (and re-invoked) through the ceremonies celebrated by the Australian Arunta people (and many other Australian indigenous people) is called ‘the dream time’.<sup>42</sup>

Why is considering pre-modern religious societies of such importance in order to analyse the medieval mystical experience? The distance separating the mentalities does not need demonstrating. At the origin of the pre-modern versus modern difference lies the shift that began with the scientific revolution. The discovery of physical and chemical laws contributed to the desacralisation of the Cosmos.<sup>43</sup> The Middle Ages could be said to be the period in which a sacred perspective on the World was last held by society, and reality was believed to include experiences including temporary lack of consciousness and seeing visions that today are considered irrational and that have been mostly medicalised.<sup>44</sup>

Within the cyclical concept of time and of life, death is believed to be a moment of passage to the beyond. In other words it represents a stage towards rebirth. The cycle suffering-death-rebirth is recurrent in all initiations and mysteries. Eliade parallels

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<sup>40</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> ‘*Templum*’ represents the spatial aspect, whereas ‘*tempus*’ is the time element, W. Müller, *Kreis um Kreuz*, Berlin, 1938, p. 39, quoted in Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 51. For the etymology, see below p. 119 n. 318.

<sup>42</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 37. In order to have a wider perception on the religious mind, Eliade suggests studying the European folklore of rural societies, given that they managed to introduce most of their ancient pre-Christian traditions into their Christianity, p. 104. Though, as Eliade wrote around the middle of last century, the situations for those rural societies he referred to may have changed since his period.

<sup>44</sup> Le Goff remarks that the other world intermediate between earth and heaven, including dreams and visions, was addressed by theologians, mystics, as well as members of the secular society. Although theology and philosophy were distinguished by the scholastic philosophers of the twelfth century, their boundaries were not clear, Le Goff, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996 [1981], pp. 271-2, 269.

experiences preceding mystical vocations to the illness of initiation of the 'shamans to be'. This moment can be regarded as a descent into chaos, which from a profane perspective resembles folly. Conversely the traditional mind has thus defeated the idea of death by transforming it into a rite of passage.<sup>45</sup> This cycle is common also in the lives of medieval mystics, whose experience often commence with illness.

### *Mystical Illness*

[He] marks himself off progressively by some strange behaviour: he seeks solitude, becomes a dreamer, loves to wander in woods or desert places, has visions, sings in his sleep. [...] The young man occasionally becomes violent and easily loses consciousness, takes refuge in the forests. [...] He becomes absent-minded or dreamy, is seized with a desire for solitude, he has prophetic visions and, in some cases, attacks that leave him unconscious [...] During this time [...] his soul is carried away by spirits'.<sup>46</sup>

This passage, which one could think that has been taken from a medieval treatise describing the behaviour of a mystic or a melancholic, is in contrast the depiction of the future shaman. The link between (medieval) mystics and shamanism is clearly stated by Eliade: 'the shamans [...] are regarded as the equivalents, among "primitives", of the religious élites and the mystics in other and more highly evolved cultures.'<sup>47</sup> Also in societies at the ethnographical stage shamans belong to a particular class of individuals. A person – who can become a shaman by 'call', on hereditary basis, and through decision by the clan or the individual – must undergo a specialist type of instruction based on an ecstatic level (through dreams and trances) and secondly on a traditional level to learn 'shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, secret language.'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Eliade, *Il sacro e il profano*, p. 124.

<sup>46</sup> Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, the Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Reality*, London, Collins, 1968, pp. 74-5.

<sup>47</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 74.

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These tendencies and cases of illness that may appear at very young age are shared by medieval mystics.<sup>49</sup> For the future shaman/mystic, the illness will 'follow the ritual of initiation'.<sup>50</sup> Julian of Norwich must have known this experience of illness and death, when she requests to God for sickness and death.<sup>51</sup> Sickness may be deemed as a common pattern of Middle English and continental female mystics.<sup>52</sup> However, it represents the first stage through which mystics and shamans undergo in their journey towards ecstasy.

The mystics' experience has often been associated with mental illness. Anthropologists are aware of the juxtaposition of mystics and mental health. Although Eliade acknowledges that some of the mystics' behaviours are close to 'the borderline of madness', he foregrounds that '*they are of an initiatory pattern and meaning*'.<sup>53</sup> One of the differences between shamans and epileptics is that the former can access a state of trance at will. Similar though it can be to the mystic's experience, the ill person's behaviour – that is not mystic – lacks the religious contents. The person who was ill could become a shaman because he was able to overcome illness, being ill revealing the crucial aspects of the human experience. Hence the illness, as in a trial of the initiatory rite, is the means through which the person is re-born, and

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<sup>49</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 74. Illness is often associated with visions: Hildegard first fell ill as a child, Elisabeth of Schönau had a vision and was ill, see E. A. Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 156-7, 161-2; Drythelm and Wetti had their visions during an illness, Alberico of Settefrati had a vision when he was ten during an illness lasted nine days and nine nights, see Le Goff, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, respectively pp. 127, 131, 207.

<sup>50</sup> The rites consist of three stages: first 'the ascent to heaven by means of a tree or a post', in the second s/he sees themselves in a dream before the Tree of the World, in the third s/he experiences the ritual death in a dream, Eliade, *Myths*, pp. 78-9. The Apple tree of the Song of Songs was interpreted as 'a symbol of Christ or the tree of the cross' where the soul climbs up in order to eat its fruit, see W. Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, London, Routledge, 1981, p. 108.

<sup>51</sup> '[D]esireing that sekenesse so herde as to deth', *Shewing*, Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. G. Ronan Crampton, originally published in *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1994. Quotations are from <<http://lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/julianfr.htm>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009] ch. 2, ll. 54-55.

<sup>52</sup> Riehle, pp. 28-9.

<sup>53</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 79, emphasis Eliade's. Some studies on the shamans of the Arctic region produced diagnoses such as 'Arctic hysteria', pp. 75-76.

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their healing coincides with the initiation.<sup>54</sup> Thus it is not correct to say that shamans are always mentally ill. N. K. Chadwick remarks that mysticism cannot be pathologised, as shamans must be healthy. She parallels shamans, mystics, and members of Monastic orders, on the base of their living in enclosures, in silence, and practising techniques of mental discipline to achieve contemplation.<sup>55</sup> More recently women mystics have been paralleled to the shamanesses in traditional cultures.<sup>56</sup>

The studies from medical and scientific perspectives have not only been confined to shamans; they have also scrutinised medieval mystics.<sup>57</sup> The mystical experience has been studied through the lenses of psychology and neuropsychology. The relationship between mysticism, or religious attitude, and illness is also present in the scientific field: diagnosis and psychiatric explanations of the phenomenon tend to follow theories prevailing in the period.<sup>58</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century mystics who showed a propensity for extreme forms of ascetism were labelled with hysteria.<sup>59</sup> Within psychiatry one could suppose that the labelling of medieval mystics

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<sup>54</sup> Eliade, *Lo sciamanesimo*, pp. 45 ff.

<sup>55</sup> N. Kershaw Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1952. She reports the details of a ceremony in which a shamaness was wearing a costume of about forty pounds of weight, and remarks how precise the shaman's movements are during the ecstatic ceremony, pp. 17-18. She emphasises the clarity of thought and the balance of the writing of St Teresa of Avila, pp. 64-69. She also maintains that to study medieval mysticism 'with its stress on ecstasy' would 'prove that contemplation, culminating in ecstasy, is not a pathological condition, but a normal deployment of certain healthy faculties, which are scarcely able to function in modern civilised communities, where the emphasis is on practical activity', p. 71.

<sup>56</sup> See N. Hopenwasser, 'Margery Kempe, St Bridget, and Marguerite d'Oingt: the Visionary Writer as Shaman', in S. McEntire ed., *Margery Kempe: a Book of Essays*, New York, Garland, 1992, pp. 165-187. Hopenwasser aims to demonstrate that the three women mystics could be deemed as shamans although they 'practiced their vocations within the parameters of Western Christianity', so missing Eliade's pivotal idea that equals shamans and mystics belonging to different cultures, see p. 72. At the end of his work Eliade acknowledges how the archaic techniques of ecstasy have undergone a transformation due to the influence and innovations of the religious context, see *Lo sciamanesimo*, pp. 536 ff.

<sup>57</sup> See Kroll and Bachrach. The two authors examine the mystic experience of a number of medieval mystics – not only British, among whom Beatrice of Nazareth or Henry Suso – from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. Mystics' writings are examined and commented upon with the support of modern studies and findings.

<sup>58</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, p. 189.

<sup>59</sup> For a brief survey of diagnosis of hysteria and the development and modifications it has undergone, see Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 191 ff. The term 'hysteria' has been replaced by 'paranoid schizophrenia, epilepsy, and, again, hysteria, and more recently with manic-depressive illness, anorexia nervosa,

with hysteria – in particular women mystics – has been in disuse. However, at times some still maintain that the behaviour of medieval women mystics was caused by the repression of sexual desires.<sup>60</sup> As to medieval mystics a certain resemblance has been noticed between the light that Hildegard saw in her visions and the visual ‘hallucinations’ occurring during migraine attacks.<sup>61</sup> Margery Kempe’s behaviour has often been scrutinised under the medical lens, and her ‘madness’ has often been pointed out.<sup>62</sup> In sum it appears that ‘the late nineteenth-early twentieth-century

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obsessionality, and borderline personality disorder’. The discussion is centred now in the wider debate concerning the relationship of religious attitude and ‘evidence of mental stability or vulnerability’. The results so far point towards the lack of evidence that people with religious attitude are emotionally maladjusted, Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 183-5. As to hysteria, Freud’s theory based on psychosexual phases of development appropriated the label of hysteria and, although it could be addressed also to males, it was applied to a model of behaviour typically feminine and irrational. Hysteria is now replaced by Karl Jasper’s definition of ‘hysterical type’, which is not biased by a sexist assumption, see p. 193 for Jasper’s whole definition. According to the two authors the conflation of hysteria and (medieval) mysticism has been exaggerated, and they underscore the influence of Victorian values applied to the mystics, ‘whose viewpoint and values in this world were completely afar from the analysts’, pp. 196, 192.

<sup>60</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, p. 192.

<sup>61</sup> See S. Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179. A Visionary Life*, London, Routledge, 1998, pp. 193 ff. Undoubtedly such interpretation scientifically based of (medieval) religious experience contributes to a wider understanding of the phenomenon. Perhaps it could also be argued that the interpretation of Hildegard’s experience, compared to ‘hallucinations’, reveals as much about our twenty-first century vision as it does illuminate our understanding of the mystics, as the following case can illustrate. A young man is taken as an example of contemporary religiousness for his exacerbated mystical zeal that would recall very closely the medieval mystics’ behaviour. (By using terms like ‘exacerbated’ ‘zeal’ the discourse is weighed with meaning immediately). Living in a secular age, he is hospitalised, transferred to a psychiatric ward, given a diagnosis of schizophrenia and treated under court order with antipsychotic medications’, Kroll and Bachrach, p. 26. According to the authors and to the medical circles, this is a case of someone who inflicted injuries upon himself because of very long hours spent in immobile meditation. It reveals how distant the two mentalities – the medieval mystical and the contemporary – are.

<sup>62</sup> See for instance the article by R. Lawes, ‘The Madness of Margery Kempe’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition: England, Ireland and Wales. Exeter Symposium VI: Papers read at Charney Manor, July 1999*, ed. M. Glasscoe, Cambridge, Brewer, 1999, pp. 147-168. After a review of the various diagnoses attributed to Kempe, and acknowledging that hysteria is dated, Lawes proceeds to demonstrate her suffering from ‘temporal lobe epilepsy’, and to underscore the symptoms of ‘post-natal disorder’, p. 167, 152 respectively. What may strike the reader is that while terms such as ‘histrionic personality disorder’, and ‘temporal lobe epilepsy’ are precisely defined through the lists of their symptoms, pp. 150, 158, Middle English expressions ‘owt of hir mende’, p. 156, and ‘alienyd of hir witte’, p. 162 are associated respectively to terms such as ‘mad’, ‘madness’, ‘psychic disease’, and to ‘post-natal disorder’, without any attempts to define ‘alienation’ in the medieval mystical sense. One might also wonder whether ‘madness’ conveys the same cultural connotations in the course of the centuries. Finally tears and sobbing are interpreted as ‘her strong emotionality’, rather than contextualising them as a stage within the mystical progress common to mystics throughout centuries; on the tradition of tears and compunction, see S. McEntire, ‘The Doctrine of Compunction from Bede to Margery Kempe’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium IV: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1987*, ed. M. Glasscoe, Cambridge, Brewer, 1987, pp. 77-90. Of opposite view to Lawes’ is S. Bhattacharji, *God is an Earthquake. The Spirituality of Margery Kempe*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997, who affirms that Margery’s contemporaries could distinguish between mystical and psychotic episodes, p. 51. Further she foregrounds that ‘The fact that she had lived through one clearly psychotic episode

approach to medieval mysticism and its ecstatic representations [...] continues to shape our thinking'.<sup>63</sup> Finally one could argue whether it is legitimate to apply the Western cultural categories of health and illness to other cultures, by which is meant both cultures other than the Western and civilisations belonging to past epochs.<sup>64</sup>

## ***2. The Techniques to the Beyond***

### **Bodily Penance**

In the course of time and in different cultures humankind has attempted to reach a different level of consciousness. What are the motivations for doing so? Mystics share the belief that the ultimate reality does not consist in the earthly world from which they wish to detach, but rather in an unseen world.<sup>65</sup> Their main aim is to interrupt the course of trivial thoughts which flow uninterrupted in the human mind. Poetically Rolle compares the inner state of peace and silent contemplation, when thoughts cease in the mind, to a 'haliday' or a 'saterdai in hir soule'.<sup>66</sup> The fight against profane thoughts is a theme that is evident throughout history and in various

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would probably disqualify her permanently as a genuine mystic in modern eyes. With our greater scientific knowledge of mental states, we tend to assume that where we can distinguish between healthy and unhealthy states of mind, the religiously obsessed Middle Ages could not. Consequently, we suspect that Margery was viewed as a mystic precisely *because* she was unbalanced; that her mysticism *consisted in* the symptoms of her mental illness. But, as we have seen, *The Book of Margery Kempe* makes a sharp distinction between her post-partum psychosis and the rest of her experiences', p. 138, emphasis Bhattacharji's.

<sup>63</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, p. 204.

<sup>64</sup> Kroll and Bachrach criticise the application of contemporary cultural categories to the fasting of medieval women as interpreted and applied to modern anorexic women, that is to say a protest against the male authority. They argue that the body weight and shape is at the centre of the present era, whereas maintaining that medieval women starved themselves for the same reason as today can be doubted and interpreted as ethnocentric attitude. However, they do acknowledge that 'all cultures [...] have psychotic forms of behaviors recognized by the indigenous population as illness', Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 187, 87 respectively.

<sup>65</sup> Kroll and Bachrach p. 48; 52. See also Underhill, p. 65.

<sup>66</sup> R. Rolle, *The Mendynge of Lyfe*, in *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*, ed. B. A. Windeatt, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 22.

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civilisations.<sup>67</sup> The stream of consciousness is not a modern finding and it is not only confronted by literature, but rather by anthropology and psychology, which refers to it as 'mental clutter'.<sup>68</sup>

Various methods can successfully interrupt the stream of consciousness. Different cultures allow different methods. Generally speaking three main techniques are employed: the use of alcohol and drugs; meditation; and ascetic practices.<sup>69</sup> Western mysticism excludes the use of alcohol and drugs. Whereas for the medieval mystics the term meditation consists of a precise rung on the ladder to contemplation, today it has a broad significance, such as 'rhythmic acoustic stimulation (chanting of a mantra or a scriptural phrase; drum beating), kinetic stimulation (rocking motion), forced hypermotility (whirling dervish), hyperventilation and breathing exercises, visual and sensory deprivation, fixed staring, such as at a crucifix or stained glass window, and seclusion and restricted mobility'.<sup>70</sup> Some of these techniques are included in medieval mystics' writing, as are some attitudes that belong to ascetic practices: praying, and reciting the beads can be compared to chanting of mantras, for instance. These techniques have been employed to attain a superior sensibility in several cultures.<sup>71</sup>

It is helpful to look at the consequences of these techniques from a physiological perspective as they affect the human body in the same way across civilisations, given

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<sup>67</sup> Cassian already confronted the problem of thought, see Kroll and Bachrach, p. 48; and more recently Simone Weil expressed the same attempt when she stated: 'The capacity to drive a thought away once and for all is the gateway to eternity', *The Gravity and the Grace*, Routledge, p. 107, quoted by Kroll and Bachrach, p. 51.

<sup>68</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 48 ff.

<sup>69</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 59 ff.

<sup>70</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, p. 61. On the employment of 'meditatio' in late-medieval religious writings, see T. H. Bestul, 'Chaucer's Parson's Tale and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation', *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 600-619, pp. 601 ff.

<sup>71</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 85.

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that the physical responses are not influenced by culture.<sup>72</sup> In Islamism preparation is necessary in order to undergo the experience of an important dream or vision, be it in sleep or when awake.<sup>73</sup> Fasting forms an integral part of the second stage on the path towards the mystical trance alongside vigils, silence and the control of thoughts.<sup>74</sup> Within American Indian culture, fasting is associated with dreaming. The seer fasts for several days until he has the 'dream of the sun' which will regulate his future life.<sup>75</sup> Margery Kempe refers to her fasting, acknowledging that bodily penance represents the beginning of her journey to contemplation.<sup>76</sup>

For medieval mysticism, sleep deprivation, fasting and self-injurious behaviour are referred to as bodily penance, upon which the instructors generally recommend moderation.<sup>77</sup> The *Cloud*-author counsels to be in guard against sickness, as contemplation requires health and purity in body and soul.<sup>78</sup> Hilton recommends discretion, as too high a level of penance might point to lack of humility, although he acknowledges that fasting disciplines the body.<sup>79</sup> Rolle recommends novices should keep their balance and health, and not become weak, or else they would not be able

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<sup>72</sup> Kroll and Bachrach, p. 27.

<sup>73</sup> F. Meier, 'Quelques aspects de l'inspiration par les demons en Islam', in *Le rêve et les sociétés humaines*, G. E. von Grunebaum and R. Cailliois eds., Paris, Gallimard, 1967, pp. 418-25, p. 419.

<sup>74</sup> J. H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1929, p. 171.

<sup>75</sup> Leuba, p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, L. Staley ed., Kempe M., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, L. Staley ed., originally published in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1996, ll. 12-19. Quotations are from <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/kemp1frm.htm>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009].

<sup>77</sup> Fasting and sleep deprivation was meant to increase the physical suffering of the mystic, Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 80-81. Today it is known that the consequences of fasting are emotional instability, irritability, and tendency towards depression as well as a drop of sexual interest, Kroll and Bachrach, p. 76. Sleep deprivation causes lack of the sense of well-being; irritability and depressed mood, and it also reduces the threshold of pain sensitivity. For examples of sleep deprivation in medieval mystics, see Kroll and Bachrach, pp. 75-88.

<sup>78</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Hodgson, ch. 41, p. 64. Quotations are from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, P. J. Gallacher ed., originally published in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1997 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/cloufrm.htm>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009].

<sup>79</sup> W. Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, ch. 22, ch. 19, ch. 2 respectively. Quotations are from *The Scale of Perfection*, T. H. Bestul ed., originally published in *The Scale of Perfection*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 2000 <<http://lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/hilfr1.htm>> and <<http://lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/hilfr2.htm>> [accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2009].



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to worship God.<sup>80</sup> An extreme abstinence from food, drink, and sleep could be inspired by the devil that wants the inexperienced novices to collapse.<sup>81</sup> Similarly Hildegard of Bingen underscores that extreme injuries to the body result in losing the person's balance.<sup>82</sup> The *Cloud*-author points out that virtues centred mainly on bodily penance without love and devotion are imperfect.<sup>83</sup>

### Praying

In order to prevent falling asleep, and to prolong the waking, mystics turn to praying. Prayers are widely used among mystics, as is staring at a crucifix, and seclusion in the case of anchorites. It has the double function of avoiding sleep, and fostering transition to another state. Hilton emphasises how important it is to withdraw all the thoughts from the earthly world so that desire, free from material thoughts, can concentrate on spiritual joy. Prayer is then compared to a fire which by its own nature tends upwards to the air.<sup>84</sup> Fixing the thoughts on spiritual matters allows the interruption of the flow of thoughts and the accession to a higher level of consciousness.

### What is Prayer?

Prayer 'is a new, gracious, lestyng will of the soule onyd and festenyd into the will of our Lord'.<sup>85</sup> According to Julian, God wants us to know

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<sup>80</sup> R. Rolle, *Form of Living*, in *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, ed. H. E. Allen, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1931, ch. 5, p. 96, ll. 4-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Form of Living*, ch. 1, p. 86, l. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Hildegard of Bingen's *Book of Divine Works*, ed. Matthew Fox, Santa Fe, Bear & Company, 1987, p. 49.

<sup>83</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 12, pp. 21-22, Hodgson. Also *An Epistle on Prayer* emphasises that behaviour based on bodily penance without affection is worthless, *An Epistle on Prayer*, in Hodgson, p. 103.

<sup>84</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 25 <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/hilfr1.htm> [accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2009]

<sup>85</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Shewings*, ll. 1413-14.

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how to pray and its purpose is to be united with him.<sup>86</sup> The *Cloud*-author states that prayer 'is not elles bot a devoute entent directe unto God, for getyng of goodes and remowyng of yvelles';<sup>87</sup> Rolle agrees on its purifying function.<sup>88</sup>

Praying does not only consist of merely repeating words. Rolle underlines that it is not a matter of quantity of prayers, but rather how they are recited.<sup>89</sup> Without intention and devotion it is a mocking prayer, as Julian refers to those people who 'scornyd bidding of beads, which arn seid boistrolosly with mouth, failing devowte entending and wise diligens the which we owen to God in our prayers'.<sup>90</sup> What Julian defines as devout intent resonates with the *Cloud*-author's concept of 'affection'; without this quality prayer and other practices, such as bodily penance, are worthless.<sup>91</sup> In one of his conversations with Margery, God puts hypocrisy and prayer in relief: people could fast, recite many beads, and say good words as a performance, and still be hypocrites.<sup>92</sup> For Hilton prayer 'is not ellis but a styngge desire of the herte to God bi a withdrawinge of thi mynde from alle ertheli thoughtes'.<sup>93</sup> He further classifies it in three degrees (see below p. 84).

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<sup>86</sup> '[T]hat our wil be turnyd into the will of our Lord, enjoyand; and so menith He whan He seith, *I make the to willen it*. [...] that we knowen the frute and the end of our prayors: that is, to be onyd and lyk to our Lord in al thyng. And to this menyng and for this end was al this lovely lesson shewid', ch. 42, ll. 1449-53, *Shewings* <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/julianfr.htm>>

<sup>87</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ll. 1421-22.

<sup>88</sup> Rolle, *The Form of Living*, ch. 6, Allen, p. 100.

<sup>89</sup> '[N]oght how mykel þou says, bot how wele', Rolle, *The Form of living*, ch. 7, Allen, p. 104, ll. 45-6.

<sup>90</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Shewings*, ch. 69, ll. 2852-54, 'Those who mock the telling of the beads when they are said aloud with the mouth only, without devotion, attention, and due care which we owe to God when we say our prayers', *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. C. Wolters, London, Penguin, 1966, p. 186.

<sup>91</sup> *An Epistle on Prayer*, p. 103.

<sup>92</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 84.

<sup>93</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 25, ll. 663-665.

### ***3. Towards the Beyond***

This section deals with the actual journey of the soul to contemplation as experienced and narrated by the mystics. To illustrate it the metaphor of the ladder and its rungs leading to Absolute reality is followed, by analysing the degrees elucidated by Hilton in his *Scale*, and the words by the other mystics by experience – who reached different degrees of contemplation. This section analyses the texts of the Middle English mystics to outline the journey to contemplation with the aim to identify the several stages and degrees as they are identified, attained, and experienced by the mystics. Observations and connections with the ecstatic technique and event are gathered in a later section in order to illustrate the steady continuity of the ascent.

The ascent is achievable through two fundamental factors: will and grace. The mystics wish to commence the ascent in order to reach the ultimate reality consisting of the union with God. Will is not sufficient to succeed, as the highest degrees of contemplation represent a gift yielded by divine grace. Mystics agree that this ascending process – which is an act of love towards the divinity – involves love and knowledge. Intellect on its own cannot achieve the ultimate knowledge that is yielded during the ecstatic moment: the ultimate reality cannot be attained by knowledge but rather by love.<sup>94</sup> Further, Rolle and Hilton disassociate from philosophers and theologians. Rolle distinguishes between ‘philosophers and sages of this world [...] great theologians bogged down in their interminable questionings’ and ‘the simple and unlearned, who are seeking rather to love God than to amass knowledge’.<sup>95</sup> Hilton agrees with Rolle in differentiating between mystics and philosophers and

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<sup>94</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 8.

<sup>95</sup> R. Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. C. Wolters, London, Penguin, 1957, p. 46.

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theologians. Being aware that the contemplative life can be chosen by all but that the highest achievement is a divine gift, signifies that only the gifted ones can reach the highest rung of the ladder to the beyond. And once there, there will always be a final cloud between the soul and the divine.<sup>96</sup>

### Contemplative Life

Hilton identifies three degrees within contemplative life. The first consists of knowledge of God achieved through reason, the teachings of others, and by the study of the Scriptures.<sup>97</sup> As this degree is obtainable by anyone through study and without the gift of grace, it is only a shadow of true contemplation.<sup>98</sup> The second degree, which can be experienced only through the gift of grace, consists of loving God; it is not of intellectual type, so it can be attained also by illiterate devout people. While they are meditating and praying they feel detached from earthly concern and they only desire to continue praying. In this degree the person feels a deep grief and outburst of tears which cleanse the soul. There are other deep feelings, though, that cannot be described. Hilton identifies two stages within the second degree: a lower which can be attained by both active and contemplative people, when the person feels a sense of fervour. This is a 'foretaste' of the true contemplation.<sup>99</sup> The higher

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<sup>96</sup> Later while dealing with the feeling of the presence and the absence of the divinity, Hilton states that it is easier to know by experience rather than by books: 'Hou that presence is feelid, it mai betere be knowen bi experience than bi ony writynge', *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 41, ll. 3113-4.

<sup>97</sup> 'Contemplatif liyf hath three parties. The first is in knowynge of God and goosteli thynges geten by resoun, bi techynge of man and bi studie of Hooly Writ, withouten goostli affeccion and inward savour feelid bi the special gift of the Hooli Goost', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 4, ll. 56-58 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/hilfr1.htm>>. To be noted that the term 'savour' echoes Augustine and Gregory, see ch. 1, p. 18 n. 83.

<sup>98</sup> '[I]t is but a figure and a schadewe of verry contemplacioun, for it hath no gosteli savoure', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch 4, ll. 64-65.

<sup>99</sup> Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, trans. L. Sherley-Price, London, Penguin, 1997, p. 6. '[A] litil tastynge of the swetenesse in the love of God', Bk. I, ch. 6, l. 124.

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stage can be achieved only by those who devote their lives to constant prayer and meditation and who have practised bodily and spiritual labour for a long time.<sup>100</sup>

The highest degree of contemplation attainable in earthly existence involves both knowledge and love.<sup>101</sup> Until this degree, by means of grace the soul has been purified from sins, 'cleensid from alle synnes', it has then detached from material thoughts, 'is taken up from alle ertheli and fleisschli affecciones, from veyn thoughtis and veyn ymaginacions'; it is 'illumyned' on spiritual truths and finally ravished out of the body in ecstasy to be united with God. The three stages of *purgatio*, *illuminatio*, *unio*, are rendered here as 'cleensid', 'illumyned', and 'ooned' 'bi ravyschyng'.<sup>102</sup>

How is contemplation attained? By means of 'redynge of Holi Writ and of hooli techynge, goosteli meditacion, and besi praeris with devocioun', Hilton answers.<sup>103</sup> Through meditation the contemplative is able to consider the virtues that are missing to him and that can be attained by praying. Reading the Scriptures, meditating and praying are the techniques suggested by Rolle and by the *Cloud*-author. While reading God speaks; while praying the mystic speaks to God; while meditating, which comes after the previous two, angels teach. Reading pertains to reason; praying involves loving hymns, 'biholdinge, overpassinge and wunderinge'; meditation leads to 'inspiracioun of God, understandinge, wysdom, and sighinge or moornynge'.<sup>104</sup> The *Cloud*-author translates: 'Lesson, Meditacion, and Oryson. Or elles to thin

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<sup>100</sup> '[T]hoo that aren in grete reest of bodi and soule, the which bi grace of Jhesu Crist and longe travaile bodili and goostli felen rest of herte and clenness in conscience, so that hem liketh nothyng so mykil for to do as for to sitte stille in reeste of bodi and for to alwey pray to God and to thynke on oure Lord', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 7, ll. 128-132.

<sup>101</sup> '[I]n cognicion and in affection: that is for to seie, in knowyng and in perfight lovyng of God', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 7, ll. 146-148. It is to be noted that the two terms of Latin derivation are translated for explanation.

<sup>102</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 8, ll. 148, 152, 154 respectively.

<sup>103</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 15, ll. 333-334.

<sup>104</sup> Rolle, *The Mendynge of Lyfe*, Windeatt, pp. 18, 19 respectively.

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understandyng thei mowe be clepid: Redyng, Thinkyng, and Preiing'.<sup>105</sup> He states that beginners and those who are making progress cannot achieve complete 'thinking', as reading or listening comes first; then 'thinking' and finally praying.<sup>106</sup> It is worth noticing that the *Cloud*-author associates reading with listening.<sup>107</sup> This association is pivotal in the process of instructing illiterate (women) who can then learn through a cleric reading to them, as in the case of Margery Kempe.

## The Journey of the Soul

### Types of Prayer

The ascending process is subdivided in prayer, meditation, and contemplation. Hilton identifies three kinds of prayer.

### 'Praier of speche'

The first degree is called vocal prayer, 'praier of speche'.<sup>108</sup> This is apt at the beginning of the spiritual life, when earthly thoughts and material desires are still strongly felt. Vocal prayers set by the church, including *Our Fathers*, *Psalms* and hymns, work like 'a siker staaf',<sup>109</sup> a staff which keeps the beginner's will up above earthly thoughts. The sweet words of the prayer will prevent the soul from falling downwards and will lift him up.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 35, ll. 1312-1313. The author refers to another book which discusses the three stages, usually thought of being Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, see Spearing trans., p. 149, n. 62.

<sup>106</sup> The modern English translation presents 'thinking', *Cloud*, Spearing trans., p. 59. It would be perhaps advisable if the translation presented the terms 'meditation' instead of 'thinking', in that 'thinking' employed by the *Cloud*-author has the evident purpose of being understood by the novice, who might not know Latin.

<sup>107</sup> 'Alle is one in maner, redyng and heryng; clerkes redyn on bookes, and lewid men redyn on clerkes, whan thei here hem preche the worde of God', *Cloud*, ch. 35, ll. 1318-20.

<sup>108</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch 27.

<sup>109</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch 27, l. 706.

<sup>110</sup> '[A]lwei fallynge downward into worldli thoughtis and fleschli affeccions', Hilton, *Scale*, ch. 27, l. 709.

### **'Praier, that is in speche not certayn'**

The second degree of prayer is still vocal but it does not consist of a set form, as it 'folweth the stirenges that aren in devocioun'.<sup>111</sup> Hilton describes it as God's gift through which the mystic can address the divine by means of the words arising from their devotion.<sup>112</sup> When this prayer that derives directly from the heart is felt, the mystic should seek solitude so that it is not interrupted. It provokes great tension and physical strain, as the mystic forcibly moves as if he were mad or drunk.<sup>113</sup>

### **The Third Degree of Prayer**

This degree is emptied of words,<sup>114</sup> as it occurs in tranquillity of body and soul in the heart of those who have received the gift of grace. The contemplative's 'affeccioun is turnyd into goostli savoure'<sup>115</sup> so that they can pray in their heart continuously. At this stage Hilton explains how to avoid the possible distractions, recalling the main concern of ridding the mind of the flow of thoughts. He describes the fight against the thoughts related to the material world interrupting the spiritual attention, and underscores how hard the process of voiding the mind can be. At times the more ardently the soul desires to attain devotion the farther it feels.<sup>116</sup> After analysing prayer, Hilton moves on to meditation, the second stage towards contemplation.

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<sup>111</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 29, ll. 733-4.

<sup>112</sup> '[T]his is whanne a man or a woman felith grace of devocioun bi the gifte of God, and in his devocioun speketh to Hym as yif he were bodili in presence, with sich wordis and acordande most to his sturyng for the tyme as comen to his mynde after sondri rewardes which he felith in his herte', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 29, ll. 736-39.

<sup>113</sup> '[I]t maketh the bodi, yif grace come myghtili, for to stire and turne heer and theer as a man that were mad or dronken and can have noo reste', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 30, ll. 761-62.

<sup>114</sup> '[O]nli in herte withouten speche', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 32, l. 789.

<sup>115</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 32, ll. 792-3.

<sup>116</sup> 'For whanne thou woldest have the mynde of thyn herte upward to God in praier, thou felist so many veyn thoughtis of thyn owen deedis bifore doon, or what thu schalt doon, or of othir mennys dedis, and siche many othire lettynge and tarynge thee, so that thou mai nevere fele savor ne reste in thi praier ne devocioun in thi seiynge. And ofte sithes the more thu traveilest to kepe thyn herte, the ferthere it is fro thee and the hardere, sumtyme fro the bigynnynge to the laste ende, that thee thinketh it is but loste, al that thou doost', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 33, ll. 818-24.

## Meditation

As a free divine gift, there are no rules and strict definitions for meditation.<sup>117</sup> From this stage knowledge and love of God are juxtaposed. Hilton illustrates this by referring to the episode when the gift of wisdom is given to the Apostles during an ecstasy at Pentecost.<sup>118</sup>

Hilton speaks of 'conversioun' and of the subsequent grief and tears of compunction.<sup>119</sup> The most conspicuous external sign is the abundance of weeping and tears, which are shed because of the visualisation of Christ's suffering.<sup>120</sup> Then the contemplative feels the goodness and the mercy of the Lord so much that their 'herte riseth up into love and glaadnesse of Him with manye swete teeris',<sup>121</sup> since their soul has been forgiven of the sins by means of the passion. In Margery's testimony outbursts of tears and sobbing are not limited to a particular section of the book, in that, as she herself states, her narration is not in chronological order.<sup>122</sup>

This stage could commence by a meditation on the humanity of the Lord, be it his passion, his birth or Mary's compassion.<sup>123</sup> This kind of meditation, which Bernard of

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<sup>117</sup> '[I]n meditacion mai no certayn rule be sette ai a man for to kepe, for thei aren the free gift of oure Lord', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 33, ll. 860-61.

<sup>118</sup> 'And al that knowynge thei hadden bi ravyschyng of love of the Hooli Goost', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 34, l. 871.

<sup>119</sup> '[W]ith gret conpuccion and sorwe of herte, grete wepynges and many teeris of the iye', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 34, ll. 875, 877-88 respectively.

<sup>120</sup> '[O]ure Lord gyveth a meditacion with gret conpunccioun and with plenté of teeris of His manhede', *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 35, 895-96; 'in this goostli sight thou felist thyn herte stired into so greet compassioun and pité of thi Lord Jhesu that thou mornest, and wepist, and criest with alle thy myghtes of thi bodi and of thi soule', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 35, ll. 907-09.

<sup>121</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch 35, ll. 912-3.

<sup>122</sup> Proem, ll. 99-100. S. McEntire remarks that Kempe's cause of tears is not everyday life but rather hers and others' sins, and the meditation upon the Passion of Christ, 'The Doctrine of Compunction', p. 88. For a study on the structure of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, see N. K. Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: the Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy and Iconography*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2007.

<sup>123</sup> '[A] meditacion with gret conpunccioun and with plenté of teeris of His manhede', Hilton, *Scale*, ch. 35, ll. 895-6. It is to be noted the copiousness of tears occurring at this stage, as is experienced by Margery Kempe after her conversion.



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Clairvaux calls 'the fleischli love of God' can lead 'to comtemplacioun of Jhesu Crist in His Godhed'.<sup>124</sup> However, meditation does not come 'alwei whan he [the contemplative] wolde, but whanne oure Lord wole gyve it'.<sup>125</sup> Sometimes the gift can be withdrawn for a certain period either to test the contemplative by means of temptation or because he may have fallen to pride.<sup>126</sup> Margery experiences this withdrawal of the gift. She asks to receive it again and reveals her understanding of its withdrawal, mentioning pride and temptations.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless the lack of the gift of meditation will lead to a higher spiritual knowledge of the divine.<sup>128</sup> By referring to a more spiritual knowledge, Hilton forementions the traits characterising the highest stage of contemplation: love and knowledge, as is seen in the next section. Meanwhile he teaches that the soul should not remain idle in the wait: so he introduces a new exercise, 'a newe travaille', by advising to 'entre into thyn owen soule bi meditacion', following Augustine's teaching.<sup>129</sup> This practice is based on developing self-knowledge as a means to attain understanding of God.

### The Gate to Contemplation – Dying to the World

Hilton discusses the passage from meditation to contemplation by means of entering one's own self and understanding one's soul.<sup>130</sup> He forewarns, though, that 'this travaille is sumdel streit and narwgh',<sup>131</sup> anticipating the metaphor of the gate mentioned in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>132</sup> The gate marks the passage from meditation to

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<sup>124</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 35, ll. 919, 922.

<sup>125</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 36, ll. 937-38.

<sup>126</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 36, ll. 943-47.

<sup>127</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 84.

<sup>128</sup> 'He dispose a man for to knowe and fele Him more goostli', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 36, ll. 947-8.

<sup>129</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 40, ll. 1063-64. '[A]s Seynt Austyn seith: 'Bi the knowynge of mysilf, I schalle gete the knowing of God', *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 40, ll. 1065-66.

<sup>130</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 42. The version C presents the sentence 'and I hope an heghe plein wey, als mykel as may be in mannes werk to comtemplacioun', note to l. 1106 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/hilfr1.htm>>

<sup>131</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 42, l. 1127.

<sup>132</sup> 'Stryve ye for to entre bi this streite gate, for the wai that ledeth to hevene is narw, and fewe men fynden it', Matthew 7. 13-14, quoted in Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 42, ll. 1130-32.

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contemplation. Rolle states that through revelation the 'dore of hevene' is opened.<sup>133</sup>

Those who have arrived at this stage by means of grace and practice stand 'in the gate of contemplacion'.<sup>134</sup> They have died to the world and are ready to self-knowledge and to enter the darkness through which they will attain a higher knowledge and love of God. The gate of contemplation is compared to the dying to this world and to the darkness. It is worth recalling Hilton's words: 'This dyyng to the world is this myrkenesse, and it is the gate of contemplacioun'.<sup>135</sup>

### 'Travaile' at the Gate

#### Bodily Penance

The contemplatives reach the gate leading to contemplation. However, as their work, 'travayle', is not finished, further recommendations and techniques are provided. The contemplative must be cleansed of all bodily sins, including love for food, lust, and pride as well as intellectual temptations.<sup>136</sup> However, Hilton warns against extreme fasting and practices that provoke pains to the head and stomach. Whereas they are appropriate in devotion, in contemplation they hinder the knowledge and the biholding of spiritual things, given that the fervour of contemplation can be only felt 'in gret reste of bodi and soule'.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Rolle, *The Mending of Life*, Windeatt ed., p. 20.

<sup>134</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, l. 1635. In chapter 27 of Book II the term 'gate' appears eight times (including the title).

<sup>135</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, l. 1699.

<sup>136</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, chs. 73, 74, 75.

<sup>137</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 75, l. 2231.

### The Secret Holes of Imagination

A second recommendation is to withdraw further from the material world. While acknowledging that the recluse whom Hilton addresses has already decreased the use of the bodily senses, he warns that she can still see images in her heart through the 'the pryvey hoolis' of imagination.<sup>138</sup> So in order to detach further from this world he advises to close these holes of imagination as well as 'the wyndowes of the wittes',<sup>139</sup> in that although she cannot see with her bodily eyes, she still retains the image of vain material objects.

### 'Werk'

In order to rise further towards Jerusalem, symbolising contemplation, further spiritual labour and work on the body ought to be performed.<sup>140</sup> prayer, meditation, reading, and working, activities that strengthen love for God and help withdraw the thoughts from vain material things further. Recitation of the rosary, meditation, waking, kneeling are appropriate practices, provided that they be discarded, should another exercise yield higher grace.<sup>141</sup> In addition to this, praying and spiritual exercises are recommended and, in case of difficulty, when concentrating on the thoughts on Jesus, 'angre thee not with hem, tarie not with hem',<sup>142</sup> recommends Hilton, so that to regain concentration on the self.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 81, ll. 2321-22.

<sup>139</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 81, ll. 2316-17.

<sup>140</sup> '[F]orthgoynge is not ellis but goostli werkes, and bodili also whanne that it nedeth', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 21, ll. 1188-89.

<sup>141</sup> Hilton suggests: 'to seyn thus many bedes, or for to thenken oonli this manere thought and thus longe tyme, or for to waken or knelen thus longe, or ony othir bodili deede', *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 21, ll. 1216-18.

<sup>142</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk II, ch. 22, l. 1277.

<sup>143</sup> '[C]ome agen to thisilf', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk II, ch. 22, l. 1282.

## Thoughts

Hilton's repeated advice to withdraw thoughts resonates with the *Cloud*-author's reflections on thinking in the stage of contemplation.<sup>144</sup> He differentiates between meditation and contemplation. He acknowledges that the way to attain contemplation passes through the 'meditation on their own sinfulness, the Passion, the kindness and excellence of God'; without this they 'will fail in their purpose'.<sup>145</sup> A person who heads towards contemplation must leave behind the spiritual techniques employed at the stage of meditation.<sup>146</sup> However holy a thought may appear, the contemplative must tread it down or else it will chatter more and more till 'he bring thee lower' and the contemplative will become 'scaterid'.<sup>147</sup>

## The Glowing Darkness

Dying to this world and entering the darkness, the 'lightli merkenesse', are the necessary steps mystics undergo in order to reach the gate and step beyond it into contemplation. Being in the glowing darkness signifies being nearer to Jerusalem, symbolising contemplation. In this darkness the contemplatives find peace and gradually they will receive spiritual light of knowledge.<sup>148</sup> This darkness is compared to death: as death can destroy a material body, in the same way the desire to love

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<sup>144</sup> '[I]n this werk it profiteth litil or noght to think of the kyndenes or the worthines of God, ne on oure Lady, ne on the seintes or aungelles in heven, ne yit on the joies in heven [...] it is fer betyr to think apon the nakid beyng of Him', *Cloud*, ch. 5, ll. 441-7.

<sup>145</sup> *Cloud*, trans. Spearing, p. 29, 'man or womman that wenith to come to contemplacion withoutyn many soche swete meditations of theire owne wrechidnes, the Passion, the kyndenes and the grete goodnes and the worthynes of God comyng before, sekirly he schal erre and faile of his purpos', *Cloud*, ch. 7, ll. 486-9.

<sup>146</sup> '[I]t behoveth a man or a womman, that hath longe tyme ben usid in theese meditations, algates leve hem, and put hem and holde hem fer down under the cloude of forgetyng', *Cloud*, ch. 7, ll. 489-91.

<sup>147</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 7, ll. 472-3, 478, 483 respectively. Forman remarks that the *Cloud*-author employs 'scattered' to refer to the affection and to the mind. When the love of a mystic is given to worldly things and creatures rather than to God is a situation of scattered affection; whereas the 'mental restlessness' of the mind wandering in a train of thoughts refers to the mind, see 'Mystical Experience in the *Cloud*-Literature', p. 181.

<sup>148</sup> '[L]ight of grace was sprongen and schal sprynge to hem that can wonen in the schadwe of deeth, that is, in this merkenesse that is like to deeth', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 25, ll. 1487-89.

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God can destroy sins and material desires and thoughts.<sup>149</sup> The process occurs gradually for those who have achieved self-knowledge: at first they will see nothing, as they plunge into the darkness. And then through prayer they will be able to see, 'and thi merkenesse schal be as myddai'.<sup>150</sup> From darkness the light of spiritual knowledge will spring.

There is only one gate,<sup>151</sup> Hilton warns, and if anyone wishes to enter by any other gates, they are like thieves and 'brekere of the wal'.<sup>152</sup> Here the image echoes the walls encircling the spiritual Jerusalem, where gates are part of the wall (see p. 103). At this stage although the contemplative is still far from attaining contemplation s/he is hidden from the vanities of the world.<sup>153</sup> Reaching this glowing darkness does not represent the end of the journey of the soul, as 'it is not yit there it schulde be; it is not yit clothid al in light, ne turned al into the fier of love'.<sup>154</sup> Light and fire, some of the fundamental traits of the highest stage of contemplation are introduced.

### 4. Contemplation – The Beyond

What is contemplation? And who can attain it? Rolle admits that it is 'hard for to telle or utterly diffine'.<sup>155</sup> Before giving his own definition, he reports what others have stated about it, commenting briefly how appropriate the definition is,<sup>156</sup> and

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<sup>149</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 25, ll. 1489-91.

<sup>150</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, l. 1761.

<sup>151</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, l. 1703.

<sup>152</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, ll. 1709-10.

<sup>153</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, l. 1707; l. 1724. Incidentally in this chapter the term 'hid' is used seven times.

<sup>154</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 25, ll. 1495-6.

<sup>155</sup> Rolle, *The Mendynge of Lyfe*, Windeatt, p. 19.

<sup>156</sup> 'Summe seyn (and wel) that contemplacioun is a knowynge of hidde thinges for to come, or elles a cesinge fro alle worldly occupaciouns, or studye of holy writte. Oother seyn (and bettere) that contemplacioun is a wonderful joyinge of hevenli thinges. The thridde seyn (and best) that contemplacioun is a wonderful joye of an upreyssed soule, deth of alle fleschly affeccions', Rolle, *The Mendynge of Lyfe*, Windeatt, p. 19.

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then Rolle provides his own, which conflates joy, sweetness and music attained through prayers and devotion.<sup>157</sup> According to Hilton Jerusalem is as mykil for to say as sight of pees, and it bitokeneth contemplacion in perfighte love of God. For contemplacion is not ellis but a sight of Jhesu, the whiche is veri pees'.<sup>158</sup> He parallels the journey to contemplation to the road to Jerusalem, although he admits that he has never been there himself.<sup>159</sup> The *Cloud*-author maintains that 'the substaunce of this werke is not elles bot a nakid entente directe unto God for Himself'.<sup>160</sup>

As this stage is yielded by divine grace, it is achievable by unlettered as well as learned, the difference being that the learned can understand the substance, whereas the unlettered may not, but this is not necessary.<sup>161</sup> The *Cloud*-author does not exclude that a person engaged in active life can achieve the height of contemplation; nevertheless this would be an exception granted by very special grace.<sup>162</sup> However, with rare exceptions, a contemplative, he warns, should not go lower than the second degree of active life.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> 'Soothly me thinketh that contemplacioun is a wonderful joye of Goddes love, conceyved in the soule with swetnesse of aungeles lovinge. This wonderful joyinge is ende of parfyte preyere and of hiest devocioun. This is a joyinge of the soule, had for hire endeles loved, brestinge out bi voys into song', Rolle, *The Mendynge of Lyfe*, Windeatt, p. 19.

<sup>158</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Book II, ch. 21, ll. 1129-31, 'contemplation 'is the perfect love of God. [...] [it is] nothing other than the vision of Jesus, who is our true peace', trans. Spearing, p. 156.

<sup>159</sup> '[T]hough it be so that I were nevere there, nevertheles as ferforth as I can I schal sette thee in the weie thedirward', Hilton, *Scale*, Book II, ch. 21, ll. 1132-33.

<sup>160</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 24, ll. 1064-5.

<sup>161</sup> 'And this grace mai be, and is, as wel in lewed as in lettred men, as anemptis the substaunce and the trewe feelynge of soothfastnesse and of goosteli savour of it in general, though thei se not so manye resons of it in special, for that nedeth not', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 43, ll. 3352-55.

<sup>162</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 21, ll. 975-6.

<sup>163</sup> Within the distinction between active and contemplative life, the *Cloud*-author identifies different degrees. Both active and contemplative life are subdivided into lower and higher; the higher degree of active life coincides with the lower degree of contemplative life. This shared degree consists of 'good spiritual meditation and earnest thought – of one's own sinfulness, with sorrow and contrition; of the Passion of Christ and the sufferings of his servants, with pity and compassion; and of the wonderful gifts, kindness and works of God in all his creation, bodily and spiritual, with thanksgiving and praise', *Cloud*, ch. 8, Spearing trans., p. 31.

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More conspicuous signs may appear in contemplatives at an earlier stage of the journey than in perfect contemplatives.<sup>164</sup> The former may undergo sudden and violent outburst of 'wepyng, sobbyng, and othere bodili stiryng',<sup>165</sup> in that the beginners' soul is still weak and cannot bear God's lightest touch.<sup>166</sup> This echoes Margery's mystical path: her outbursts of tears, which have been deemed controversial, would fit neatly into Hilton's analysis.<sup>167</sup> Hilton does not devalue the experience. Conversely, he acknowledges that it is granted as a gift from God. Nevertheless he is also aware that these outward expressions of mystical experience are not present in those who have been awarded the gift of perfection and that, given their power, profanes could interpret these manifestations as ecstatic experiences.<sup>168</sup> Typical traits of contemplation are the following: fervour or heat; the opening of the spiritual eye of the soul, a different kind of prayer, the gift of understanding the Holy Scriptures, love and knowledge, and the interruption of any activity due to a stir, which can be interpreted as ecstasy or ravishment.

### Fire and Heat

Fire and heat signpost the ascent on the ladder to contemplation.<sup>169</sup> Hilton explains that those who have not yet been made perfect by grace can improve their love by means of imagination. He refers to phenomena such as hearing sweet music, seeing

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<sup>164</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 29.

<sup>165</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 29, ll. 1887-8.

<sup>166</sup> Their 'fervour is so moche in outward schewyng it is not oonli for mykilnesse of love that thei han, but it is for litilnesse and weikenesse of hire soulis, that mowen not beeren a litil touchyng of God', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 29, ll. 1878-80.

<sup>167</sup> 'Unto this I may seien, as me thenketh, that this goostli feelynges, whethir thei stonde in conpuccion or devocioun, or in goostli imaginacion, aren not the goosteli felynges whiche a soule schal have and fele in the grace of contemplacioun. I seie not but that thei aren soothfaste and graciously goven of God, but thise soulis that feelen sich aren not yit reformed in feelyng, ne thei han not yit the gifte of perfeccioun ne goosteli the brennyng love of Jhesu, as thei mai come to', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 29, ll. 1863-68. Catherine of Siena identifies five types of tears, see D. de Courcelles, *Il dialogo di Caterina da Siena*, Milano, Jaca book, 2000, pp. 100 ff. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogues*, trans. S. Noffke, London, SPCK, 1980, pp. 161 ff.

<sup>168</sup> '[W]epyng and sighhinge, praiyng, knelyng, and spekyng, and othere bodili stiryng, so fer forth that it semeth to anothis man that thei weren ai raveschid in love', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 29, ll. 1871-72.

<sup>169</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 30.

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lights, and feeling sweet flavours, and comfortable heat in the body.<sup>170</sup> Love for God has three degrees. Although each of them is good, every one is better than the other. The first degree occurs without grace by means of faith only and does not involve any knowledge of God.<sup>171</sup> The second is achieved through imagination by faith and the soul knows Christ in his manhood, and is better than the previous.<sup>172</sup> The last degree of love is perfect love and leads to the knowledge of God both in his manhood and his divinity.<sup>173</sup>

When these experiences occur in imagination they are not spiritual. In order to illustrate the difference, Hilton mentions how at Pentecost the Apostles received divine grace under the form of tongues of fire. The flames, representing the Holy Spirit, were invisible and they were invisibly felt, so that ‘thorough His blisside presence so cleerli and so brennandeli, that thei hadden sodeynli the goostli knowynge of soothfastnesse and the perfeccion of love’.<sup>174</sup> The fire and the heat are evidence of that grace. Margery often feels the sensation of fire. After hearing Christ’s sweet voice, she feels the ‘unqwenchabyl fyer of lofe which brent ful sor in hir sowle’.<sup>175</sup> Rolle states that the fire of the Holy Ghost is felt during meditation, prayer, and work, and it is so delightful that he cannot describe it. He agrees that feeling the burning and yearning for heaven is a criterion to identify whether one is in a state of charity.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> ‘[A]s heeryng of delitable songe, or feelynge of comfortable heete in the bodi, or seynge of light, or swettenesse of bodili savour’, Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 30, ll. 2068-70.

<sup>171</sup> ‘[W]ithouten gracious imaginacioun or goostli knowynge of God’, Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 30, ll. 1980-1.

<sup>172</sup> ‘[W]han the imaginacioun is stired bi grace, and for whi, the gostli iye is opened in bihooldynge of oure Lordis manhede’, Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 30, ll. 1984-5.

<sup>173</sup> ‘[A] soule feeleth thorough gosteli sight of the Godhede in the manhede’, Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 30, l. 1986.

<sup>174</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 30, ll. 2081-2.

<sup>175</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 41, ll. 2313-4.

<sup>176</sup> Rolle, *Mendynge of Lyffe*, chs. 2, 8, 10 respectively.



## The Beginning of Contemplation

### The 'gostli iye' of the Soul is opened

*Non contemplantibus nobis que videntur, sed que non videntur; quia que videntur, temporalia sunt, que autem non videntur, eterna sunt*.<sup>177</sup> This quotation from St Paul introduces to the stage of contemplation, as the shift into a higher level of awareness. Through the opening of the spiritual eye of the soul provided by grace it is possible to have a glimpse of God. Then the soul is able to understand the spiritual meaning of the descriptions that in the Scriptures are rendered by means of words related to the material world.

The double level of the meaning of the words is a topic dear to the mystics. The *Cloud*-author devotes several chapters in explaining how fundamental it is to interpret the words according to their spiritual rather than literal meaning.<sup>178</sup> The multifaceted value of the words was known to Margery as she demonstrates when, questioned by 'a gret clerke', she reports both the literal and the metaphorical meaning of the biblical expression '*Crescite et multiplicamini*'.<sup>179</sup> The employment of the material words is due to the finiteness of human nature that cannot understand God. When the inner spiritual eye is open the soul attains an insight of the spiritual significance of the words.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> [We do not contemplate the things that we see, but those that we do not see, because what we see is temporal but what we do not see is eternal], 2 *Corinthians* 4:18, quoted in *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 33, ll. 2293-95.

<sup>178</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 51, ll. 58-61.

<sup>179</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 51.

<sup>180</sup> '[W]hanne the innere iye is opened thorough grace for to han a litil sight of Jhesu, thanne schal the soule turne lightli inowgh alle sich wordes of bodili thyngis into goostli undirstondynge', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 33, ll. 2287-89.



## Love and Knowledge

The opening of the spiritual eye is related to the knowledge and love of God. Hilton makes the point that knowledge derives from love and not vice versa, as God's love leads the soul to knowledge.<sup>181</sup> It is God's love that opens the spiritual eye of the soul so that it can see the truth<sup>182</sup> and acknowledge the nothingness of the worldly things compared to the joy and love experienced in front of the knowledge of truth.<sup>183</sup> The *Cloud*-author agrees with Hilton that in this life love, not knowledge, can reach God.<sup>184</sup> Although the gifts from grace, ('the gifts of prophecy, of working miracles, of knowledge and counsel, of enduring severe fasting and penance')<sup>185</sup> are great, the gift of divine Love is greater.<sup>186</sup> Contemplation, 'biholdynge', of the divinity is granted by 'inspiracion of special grace',<sup>187</sup> nonetheless it cannot be achieved by study only.<sup>188</sup> Study and 'traveile' represent the active attempt of the will to achieve the Absolute. Nevertheless study and natural wit are not sufficient. The author proceeds to list the various terms and expressions employed by several writers who reported the gift according to their own experience, underscoring that although they employ a variety of words, they refer to the same truth.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 34.

<sup>182</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 37.

<sup>183</sup> '[T]hat joie and that love that it feeleth in the goostli sight of Jhesu and knowynge of soothfastnesse', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 37, ll. 2616-17.

<sup>184</sup> 'For whi love may reche to God in this liif, bot not knowing', *Cloud*, ch. 8, ll. 587-8.

<sup>185</sup> 'The gifte of profesie, the gifte of myracles-werkyng, the gift of grete kunnyng and conceilynge, and the gifte of grete fastynge or of grete penaunce-doyng, or ony othir siche', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 36, ll. 2495-97; Sherley-Price trans., ch. 36, p. 209.

<sup>186</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 36, l. 2051.

<sup>187</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 40, l. 2856.

<sup>188</sup> 'What this openynge of this goostli iye is the grettest clerk in erthe coude not ymagene bi his kyndeli wit, ne schewe fulli bi his tunge. For it mai not be geten thorough studie ne bi mannys traveile oonli, but principali thorough grace of the Hooli Goost and with traveile of man', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 40, ll. 2857-60.

<sup>189</sup> 'This openynge of the goostli iye is that lighti merkenesse and that riche nought that I spak of bifore, and it mai be callide purité of spirit and gosteli reste, inward stillenesse and pees in conscience, highnesse or deepnesse of thought and oonlynesse of soule, a liyfli feelyng of grace and priveté of herte, the waker sleep of the spouse and a taastyng of heveneli savour, brennyng in love, schynyng in light, entré of contemplacion and reformyng in feelyng [...] and though thei aren dyvers in schewyng of wordes, neveretheles thei aren alle oon in sentence of sothfastnesse', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 40, ll. 2863-71.

## Silence – Silent Prayer in Contemplation

At this stage of contemplation Hilton recommends a special manner of praying. Although the same prayers, including *Our Father* and the *Psalms*, are employed, they are not recited in the usual vocal manner.<sup>190</sup> it is recited 'in ful greet stilnesse of vois and softenesse of herte'.<sup>191</sup> This manner of praying enables the contemplative to leave all thoughts and temptations of the material world behind. Although it does not represent full contemplation, it is part of it as it is granted by grace to a soul that is warmed by the fire of love through the opening of the spiritual eye.<sup>192</sup>

If prayer in the higher stages of contemplation consists of words, which is rare, they should be very short or, even better, of only one syllable.<sup>193</sup> This one-syllable prayer rises up to heaven quickly as it is 'preyed with a fulle spirite'.<sup>194</sup> The prayer can be even more silent, given that communication with God is different from that with a human being. With the divinity it is recommendable not to use the bodily communication, be it through expression, voice, word, or body.<sup>195</sup> The absence of words emerges also in the divine teaching Julian receives.<sup>196</sup> God does not communicate through words or voice but rather He reaches the soul directly.

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<sup>190</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 42.

<sup>191</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 42, ll. 3171-2. The contemplative will concentrate on every single word and syllable paying attention to utter them in complete harmony of lips and heart, and acknowledging they are 'prively praieth', *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 42, l. 3176.

<sup>192</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 42, ll. 3184-3202.

<sup>193</sup> 'And yif thei ben in wordes, as thei ben bot seldom, than ben thei bot in ful fewe wordes; ye, and in ever the fewer the betir. Ye, and yif it be bot a lityl worde of o silable, me think it betir then of to', *Cloud*, ch. 37, ll. 1367-9. Forman emphasises the correspondence between this and the Hindu and Buddhist techniques of meditation based upon the repetition of a single word or syllable, see 'Mystical Experience in the *Cloud-Literature*', pp. 184-5.

<sup>194</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 38, l. 1387.

<sup>195</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 47, ll. 1644 ff.

<sup>196</sup> 'Than He, without voice and openyng of lippis, formys in my soule these words', Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, LV, ch. 13, ll. 500-1.

## Revelation

After prayer Hilton identifies a change in the contemplative's experience due to grace that interrupts vocal prayer and yields a new manner of seeing and experiencing God.<sup>197</sup> At first it leads the soul to see God in the Holy Scriptures where he 'is hid and helid therinne'.<sup>198</sup> The understanding of the Scriptures is granted without effort to those who have had their spiritual eyes opened and who burn with the fire of love,<sup>199</sup> and it is yielded gradually.<sup>200</sup> Hilton reinforces the concept of gradual ascent by showing how attaining wisdom and the Absolute is like climbing up the rungs of the ladder towards the beyond. Since the power of grace is so powerful, understanding and grasping the truth of the Holy Scriptures can be yielded to anyone, learned and unlettered.<sup>201</sup>

## Rapture – 'Ravischment' – 'Drawynges'

The contemplatives hear the voice of divine grace and are able to recognise it without being deceived. The secret voice of God is so powerful that, when it makes itself heard, the soul can interrupt any occupation and is transported out and far away from all material concerns.<sup>202</sup> The soul is not interested in the earthly matters any longer and departs from them, as it receives certain 'illuminacions'.<sup>203</sup> However, this

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<sup>197</sup> '[T]o seen and feelen', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 43, l. 3279.

<sup>198</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 43, l. 3281.

<sup>199</sup> '[T]he wordes and the sentence of Holi Writ, unsought and unavised, oon aftir anothir, and expouneth hem redili, be thei nevere so hard or so privei', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 43, ll. 3305-06.

<sup>200</sup> 'He maketh the soule wise ynowgh for to undirstonde alle Hooli Writte - not alle at ones in special biholdyng, but thorough that grace the soule receyveth a newe ablenesse, and a gracious abite for to undirstonde it speciali whanne it cometh to mynde', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 43, ll. 3294-97.

<sup>201</sup> 'And this grace mai be, and is, as wel in lewed as in lettred men', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 43, ll. 3352-3.

<sup>202</sup> '[I]t is of so greet myght sumtyme, that the soule sodenly leith of hande al that there is - praiynge, spekyng, redyng, or thenkyng in manere bifore seid, and al maner bodili werk - and lesteneth therto fulli, herende, perceyvande in reste and in love the swete stevene of this goostli vois, as it were ravesched fro the mynde of alle ertheli thynges', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 44, ll. 3421-25.

<sup>203</sup> The author defines these illuminations as 'the spekynges of Jhesu and the sight of goostli thynges', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 44, ll. 3441-2.

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is not the highest stage. Hilton illustrates a greater elevation when the divinity 'scheweth more and ledeth the soule innere'.<sup>204</sup> Rolle identifies two types of rapture. The first occurs when the mystic 'is rapt out of all physical sensation'. Although he is not dead, he feels nothing; the second type 'comes through the lifting up of the mind to God in contemplation'.<sup>205</sup> Whereas the first can be experienced even by sinners, the second only pertains to those who love God, and Rolle maintains, it is 'most desirable and lovely'.<sup>206</sup>

### Mystical Marriage

The soul rejoices and would wish to remain in this state. God can reveal himself to the soul in different ways: as a divinity to be feared, as a Father or as a Spouse. According to Hilton the ultimate purpose of the divine working in the soul is 'to make it a trewe spouse to Him in the highnesse of love': the aim of the journey is that of spiritual marriage, 'trewe spousage', the union with God.<sup>207</sup> The ascent does not only consist of the opening of the spiritual eye and the revelation of spiritual matters, but rather of the love of God himself who is the highest being.<sup>208</sup> In the last stage the soul perceives spiritual beings, including angels who help the soul to be lifted, it 'riseth' towards the contemplation of the godhead, and finally it understands the truth of the Trinity. The highest point of contemplation is the perfect knowledge of Christ both in his divinity and his manhood.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 44, l. 3407.

<sup>205</sup> Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 37, p. 166.

<sup>206</sup> Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 37, p. 166.

<sup>207</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 44, ll. 3443-4, 3446.

<sup>208</sup> 'The drawynge of a soule fulli to perfite love is first bi the schewynge of goostli thynges to a clene soule, whanne the gosteli iye is opened: not that a soule schuld reste thereinne, and make an ende there, but bi that yit seeke Him and loven Him oonli that is highest of alle', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 44, ll. 3452-55.

<sup>209</sup> '[T]his knowyng is worthiest and highest', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 46, ll. 3564-3565.

The experience of the spiritual marriage has been narrated by Margery.<sup>210</sup> The Father addresses her in a church in Rome communicating that she will be wedded to the Godhead<sup>211</sup> and he will show her His secrets and mysteries. Her first reaction is silence and fear.<sup>212</sup> The Second Person replies to the Father, who then takes her by her hand in her soul and in front of the Son, the Holy Ghost, the Mother and a multitude of saints and angels utters the formula of the spiritual marriage.<sup>213</sup> The feelings Margery experienced after the spiritual marriage are well worth lingering upon. She emphasises the different sensations experienced through her senses: she sensed sweet smells, she heard sounds and melodies, and with her eyes she saw white things flying around her. Furthermore she was given the gift of the fire of love. Margery does not need to be afraid of this flame, as it is the heat of the Holy Ghost, as God explains.<sup>214</sup>

The fear, the awe in front of the divinity, is a common trait of the mystical union. Awe is mentioned by Julian in her first vision. When it ceased, she remained in awe, and 'abode with reverent drede, joyand'.<sup>215</sup> Through this dread the mystic flies 'from all that is not good' to the Lord.<sup>216</sup> The *Cloud*-author states that this matter is

<sup>210</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 35.

<sup>211</sup> 'I wil han the weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn the my prevyteys and my counsels, for thu schalt wonyn wyth me wythowtyn ende', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 35, ll. 2004-6.

<sup>212</sup> '[S]ylens in hir sowle [...] sche was ful sor aferd of the Godhed', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 35, ll. 2006-7.

<sup>213</sup> 'I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so that thu be buxom and bonyr to do what I byd the do. For, dowtyr, ther was nevyr childe so buxom to the modyr as I schal be to the bothe in wel and in wo, to help the and comfort the. And therto I make the suyrte', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 35, ll. 2030-4.

<sup>214</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 35, 'swet smellys wyth hir nose', l. 2039; 'sowndys and melodiis', l. 2042; 'white thyngys flying al abowte hir', l. 2047; 'a flawme of fyre wondir hoot and delectabyl and ryth comfortabyl, nowt wastyng but evyr incresyng, of lowe', ll. 2060-2; 'this hete is the hete of the Holy Gost', l. 2066.

<sup>215</sup> Julian, *Shewing*, LV, ch. 8, l. 303.

<sup>216</sup> 'That drede that makith us hastily to flee from all that is not good, and fallen into our Lords brest [...] with all our entent and with all our mynd', *Shewing*, LV., ch. 74, ll. 3044-6. Julian identifies four types of dread: the dread caused by fright and weakness, the dread of pain, the dread of doubts, and the dread originated by reverence, which is the only holy one, Julian, *Shewing*, ch. 74, ll. 3015-43.

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terrifying,<sup>217</sup> as it consists in traversing the 'cloud of unknowing' that is situated between the mystic and God. Although it is in between, the cloud can be interpreted as a means by which the human condition and the divinity can be connected.<sup>218</sup> The contemplation can be transient or permanent, and it is represented by Moses and Aaron respectively.<sup>219</sup>

The very last teaching expressed by Hilton hinges on the high secrecy of the 'daliaunce' of the soul with God who reveals mysteries.<sup>220</sup> This echoes God's communication to Margery concerning showing her 'prevyneys' and 'counsels'.<sup>221</sup> Secrecy is also experienced by Julian. Although she saw what God wants to be revealed and known, nevertheless this consists of secret things that are hidden.<sup>222</sup> Julian saw other hidden secrets that will be known only when humankind will be worthy.<sup>223</sup> The journey of the soul, as can be expressed by words, ends in the unutterable. A soul guided by grace, Hilton asserts, 'mai seen more in an hour of siche goosteli matier than myght be writen in a grete book'.<sup>224</sup> Congruent with its being unutterable, the *Cloud*-author focuses on the transient ravishment rather than on the permanent.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> '[T]his mater so harde and so feerful', *Cloud*, ch. 71, l. 2381.

<sup>218</sup> Forman speaks of 'conjunctive' and 'disjunctive' usages of the cloud, p. 188.

<sup>219</sup> The first type of contemplation, transient, 'the whiche callyng is clepid ravisching', l. 2388. Moses climbed the mountain after a long spiritual labour, whereas Aaron, representing the second type, can enter contemplation at will, 'thei mowe have it when thei wolen in the comoun state of mans soule: as in sitting, goyng, stondyng, or knelyng', ll. 2390-91, see also Forman, p. 186.

<sup>220</sup> 'He scheweth privetees', *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 46, l. 3571. 'Alle thise lovely daliaunces of privei speche atwixe Jhesu and a soule mai be called an hid word', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 46, ll. 3573-4.

<sup>221</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 35, ll. 2005-6.

<sup>222</sup> 'For the thyngs that He will have privy, mytyly and wisely Hymselfe He hydeth hem for love', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 46, ll. 1633-4.

<sup>223</sup> 'For I saw in the same shewing that mech privy is hid, which may never be knowen into the tyme that God of His goodnes hath made us worthy to sen it', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 46, ll. 1634-36.

<sup>224</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 46, l. 3594.

<sup>225</sup> See Forman, p. 186.

## The Degrees of Prayer

While illustrating the contemplative stages, Hilton declares that the journey occurs gradually, and employs the image of the ladder by which a contemplative can rise.<sup>226</sup>

In order to make the succession of the stages clearer, it may be helpful to sum these up.<sup>227</sup> The journey represents a whole process that could be defined as 'prayer' within which two kinds of prayer can be identified: ordinary prayer, and mystical prayer, each subdivided into four degrees.<sup>228</sup> Ordinary prayer is made up of vocal prayer or recitation of set prayers; meditation, also called methodical or discursive;<sup>229</sup> affective prayer; and prayer of simplicity or simple gaze. Mystical prayer (or graces) is composed of prayer of quiet; prayer of union or semi-ecstatic; ecstasy or ecstatic union; and transforming union or spiritual marriage. When ecstasy is sudden and occurs violently it is called 'rapture'.

Two stages of transition have been first identified by John of the Cross who defined them as the 'Night of the Soul'.<sup>230</sup> The first occurs before the mystical prayer that is defined the first night of the soul. The second night of the soul is the transitory stage soon before the spiritual marriage and it is called the 'Night of the Mind'.<sup>231</sup> Visions and revelations are phenomena belonging to mystical prayer (or graces).<sup>232</sup> These stages can be represented as follows.

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<sup>226</sup> '[N]e more than a man that wole clymbe upon an high laddre and setteth his foot upon the lowest stele mai atte the nexte fleen up to the higheste; but hym bihoveth bi processe gon oon aftir anothir, til he mai come to the overeste', Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 17, ll. 882-5.

<sup>227</sup> The classification of prayer is based upon A. Poulain's *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, quoted by Leuba, pp. 177-79 as well as on *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed. C. G. Herbermann, London, Caxton Publishing, 1907-12, 'prayer', vol. 12, pp. 345-50, and 'contemplation', vol. 4, pp. 324-29.

<sup>228</sup> Leuba, pp. 177-179.

<sup>229</sup> This degree can be also called 'prayer of reflection' according to *Catholic Encyclopedia*, entry 'contemplation', p. 325.

<sup>230</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'contemplation', p. 327.

<sup>231</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'contemplation', p. 327.

<sup>232</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'contemplation', pp. 325, 327.



Ordinary Prayer	Vocal prayer (recitation of set prayers)
	Meditation (methodical or discursive)
	Affective
	Prayer of simplicity (simple gaze)
	Night of the Soul
Mystical Prayer (Graces)	Prayer of quiet
	Prayer of union (semiecstatic)
	Ecstasy (ecstatic union)
	Night of the Mind
	Transforming union / Spiritual Marriage

## 5. *Mystical Figurative Imagery*

The mystical experience presents common traits in mystics of different epochs and religions.<sup>233</sup> The mystics' language is rich in images, employed individually or often in association with others. Gates and holes, and the passage through them, the ladder, the tree, the fire, the flight – all appear to be common features in the religious ecstatic imagery of different cultures. Some of the figurative imagery employed by mystics is explored here, as they recur in medieval dream visions that are investigated in Part II.

### The Gate

In Hilton's *Scale* the image of the gate is the first that signposts the passage unto another state.<sup>234</sup> It is already found in the Scriptures in Christ's words 'I am the door. By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in, and go out, and shall find pastures'.<sup>235</sup> Rolle reports that his experience of conversion and contemplation

<sup>233</sup> See M. Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith*, London, New York, Longman, 1993, p. 3

<sup>234</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27.

<sup>235</sup> *John*, 10:9, quoted in Glasscoe, *Games of Faith*, p. 183. The expression pivoting on the image of the door is also recalled in *The Book of Privy Counselling*, see Glasscoe, *Games of Faith*, p. 187.

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occurs 'the day the door of Heaven swung back'.<sup>236</sup> In *Melos Amoris* he expresses his desire to undergo the mystical experience by the expression 'to enter the portas [...] paradisici pastus'.<sup>237</sup>

The representations of the cities of Babylon and of Jerusalem, the former symbolising 'the life of sinners in the world', and the latter 'the spiritual life',<sup>238</sup> have the common features of a surrounding wall and two gates. The gates of Babylon represent birth and death,<sup>239</sup> whereas the lower gate of Jerusalem symbolises the Catholic faith and the upper gate represents 'the gate to contemplation' in Hugh of St Victor's words.<sup>240</sup>

The gate can be associated with the image of the wall, as in the expression of the 'brekere of the wal'<sup>241</sup> (see *Glowing Darkness*, p. 90). It gives access to a space otherwise inaccessible, because it is delimited and fenced off by a wall. Hence the only access is through the gate-door.

The door represents the limit between the outside world and the domestic world, in the case of a house; in that of a temple it is the limit between profane world and sacred world.<sup>242</sup> It is associated with the concept of dying to the world (see above, *The Gate to Contemplation*, p. 87).<sup>243</sup> This association recalls the rite the anchorites

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<sup>236</sup> Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 15, p. 92.

<sup>237</sup> Quoted in Riehle, p. 36.

<sup>238</sup> Gardner, p. 155.

<sup>239</sup> Gardner, p. 155.

<sup>240</sup> Quoted in Gardner, pp. 156-7.

<sup>241</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, l. 1709-10.

<sup>242</sup> A. van Gennep, *Riti di passaggio*, Torino, Boringhieri, 1981, p. 18.

<sup>243</sup> Hilton states: 'This dyyng to the world is this myrkenesse, and it is the gate of contemplacioun', *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, l. 1699. Hilton reinforces the same concept later: 'This hundredfolde that a soule schal have yif he forsake the worlde is not ellis but the profight of this lighti merkenesse, that I calle the gate of contemplacioun', *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 27, ll. 1722-24.

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undergo when they leave this world, and they die to this world: the door separates their cell and the earthly world.

The door is also a fundamental transitional symbol between states, witnessing the continuity of the two worlds (see ch.1, p. 42). The space of Earthly Paradise was localised in continuity with the earthly world. When the geography of Purgatory was developing, entrances were localised, so that the way of communication between the beyond and the human world could be possible.<sup>244</sup> St Patrick's purgatory can be recalled here. Those who wish to step into purgatory, the beyond, cross the threshold. The door is closed behind them and subsequently reopened to show whether they return to this world or have departed forever.<sup>245</sup>

With regard to symbolic death, in several cultures at the ethnological state, during the initiation rite the future shaman witnesses his own death in dreams or visions. Only after symbolic death can he be re-born to new life 'with a mystical sensibility'.<sup>246</sup> Death symbolises regeneration and spiritual birth.<sup>247</sup> Unlike the profane concept of death as end of life – initiatory death consists of 'killing one's own profane historic existence to re-enter an immaculate, open existence'.<sup>248</sup> In these terms symbolic death is not an end but the beginning of a new life. A common pattern in both mysteries and in the experience that precedes the mystic vocation can be identified: 'suffering, death and resurrection', where death is considered as a '*rite of passage*'.<sup>249</sup> From this perspective if the (painful) periods of illness of medieval mystics is considered,

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<sup>244</sup> At first the entrances of Purgatory were not distinguished from the holes which lead to Hell. Later these holes would become wells, Le Goff, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, p. 226.

<sup>245</sup> Le Goff, *La nascita del purgatorio*, pp. 215 ff.

<sup>246</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 85.

<sup>247</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, pp. 202-3.

<sup>248</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 227.

<sup>249</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 230. Eliade's emphasis.

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'suffering', then illness and suffering represent a stage on the path to the symbolic death to this profane life and to spiritual rebirth and mystical union.

In figurative representations mystics receiving visions from the divinity are usually portrayed in a space delimited by two pillars surmounted by an arch where the visionary is alone. Hildegard receiving a vision is represented (*Liber Scivias*) dictating to her scribe, who only has his ear in the delimited space (see fig. 3). This signifies that he can hear Hildegard's voice but he is not receiving a revelation. Similarly the medieval poet is secluded in his bedchamber, as is explored in depth in Part II (see pp. 164 ff.).

### The Ladder

In Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* the ladder symbolises the ascent of the soul to God.<sup>250</sup> According to John of the Cross, the secret contemplation is paralleled to a ladder up which the soul ascends in order to acquire knowledge.<sup>251</sup> Dante sees the ladder in the sphere of Saturn, where he meets the contemplative souls.<sup>252</sup> He is incited to climb it by Beatrice to complete his knowledge.<sup>253</sup> In this context climbing the ladder is associated with the flight, and represents being rapt.<sup>254</sup> Hildegard has a vision of a

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<sup>250</sup> Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, p. 30.

<sup>251</sup> Gardner, p. 305.

<sup>252</sup> Looking into the planet Saturn, Dante sees a golden ladder along which the spirits move. It is so high that he cannot see the top, Dante Alighieri, *Par.*, XXI, 25-33. This ladder results to be Jacob's ladder, which explains the reason why its summit cannot be seen by mortal eyes, *Par.*, XXII, 70.

<sup>253</sup> 'La dolce donna dietro a lor mi pinse

Con un sol cenno su per quella scala,

Sì sua virtù la mia natura vinse;

Nè mai quaggiù, dove si monta e cala

Naturalmente, fu sì ratto moto,

Ch'agguagliar si potesse alla mia ala', *Par.*, XXII, 100-105

[The sweet lady impelled me after them with a single sign up by that stairway, so did her power surpass my nature; Nor ever here below, where one mounts and descends naturally was so swift a motion that it could be equalled to my flight], trans. in Gardner, pp. 305-6.

<sup>254</sup> In *Par.*, XXI, 34-42 Dante compares the movements of the saints along the ladder to the flight of birds; and in *Par.* XXII, 100-105 his ascent is represented by flight by means of the word 'wing',

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ladder being leant against a human head 'with various stages of ascent' being the senses through which it is possible for the humankind 'to gaze out at all the creatures'.<sup>255</sup> As has been stated earlier (see p. 69) the ladder has a similar meaning to the tree, the pole or pillar, and the cross, in that they all symbolise the ascent. Rolle represents the ascent by means of the apple tree of the *Song of Songs* – which in the Middle Ages was considered as a symbol of Christ as well as the tree of the cross.<sup>256</sup> In one of Margery's visions God addresses her and reassures her by stating that she was a chosen soul in that she was a pillar of the Holy Church.<sup>257</sup>

### The Fire

The fire is an image often recurrent in mystics' and saints' writing. Further to the evidence outlined in the previous section by the words of the Middle English mystics (p. 93), Mechtilde of Magdeburg (1210-1285/91) compares God to 'a consuming fire [...] As vital heat, holding eternal life in itself, this hath produced all things from itself'.<sup>258</sup> She continues the simile employing terms related to fire and heat, including 'flying sparks', 'rays', and 'living coals of this fire'.<sup>259</sup> Similarly St Catherine of Genoa employs the image of fire to illustrate the divine: '[God is] the Fire of Pain and the Light of Joy to souls'.<sup>260</sup> The experience of sickness, like the initiatory trials, provokes a change so that the sensibility of the initiated is heightened.<sup>261</sup> As a consequence the

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rendered in the English translation by 'flight', l. 105. Gardner maintains that the former passage was inspired to Dante by Richard of St Victor, Gardner, p. 173. For the association of the ladder with rapture, see Gardner, p. 307.

<sup>255</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, p. 89.

<sup>256</sup> Riehle remarks that the soul ascends the tree and eats its fruit signifies implicitly that the soul is fed with God, p. 108.

<sup>257</sup> '[A] peler of Holy Cherch', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 13, l. 671. Windeatt notices that also some German mystic women considered themselves as a pillar, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt, London, Harmondsworth, 1985, p. 306, n. 5.

<sup>258</sup> Quoted in Gardner, p. 275.

<sup>259</sup> Quoted in Gardner, p. 275.

<sup>260</sup> Quoted in Gardner, p. 276.

<sup>261</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 81.

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future shaman undergoes new experiences including 'illumination'. It consists of 'a mysterious light that the shaman suddenly feels in his body, in the interior of his head, at the very centre of the brain, an inexplicable guiding light, a luminous fire which makes him able to see in the dark'.<sup>262</sup>

### The Flight

In Julian, flying and ascending to God are associated with the feeling of reverent dread of the holy (see p. 100). The images symbolising the soul ascending towards the Absolute are usually bound with the images of wings and birds. Richard of St Victor compares contemplation to a flight of birds (see ch. 1, p. 44, n. 223).<sup>263</sup> The simile between the soul and the bird recurs within Hildegard's writing: 'the soul, by reaching an agreement with the body, flies up into the heavens like a bird in the air. [...] Thus day by day we fly up into the brightness of eternal joy when we take delight in contemplative faith and the wisdom of the Holy Scripture'.<sup>264</sup> Some centuries later the image of the flight is illustrated by St Theresa (1515-1582) in direct association with ecstasy: 'Other terms for rapture are *flight of the spirit*, *elevation of the*

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<sup>262</sup> Eliade, *Myths*, p. 82, with regard to the experience of the 'prophetic heat', see pp. 92 ff. See also *Lo sciamanesimo*, pp. 504 ff.

<sup>263</sup> 'The vivacity of the understanding in the mind of the contemplative with wondrous agility now goes and returns; now, as it were, wheels itself round; but now, as it were, gathers itself together, and fixes itself motionless. Verily, if we rightly consider, we see the image of this thing daily in the birds of the air. [...]. Surely, according to the exemplar of these similitudes, the flight of our contemplation is varied in many forms, and is shaped in various fashion according to the variety of persons and concerns', *Benjamin major*, I, 5, quoted in Gardner, pp. 173-4.

<sup>264</sup> Hildegard, p. 111. Hildegard's ninth vision is outstanding, in that it conflates several images at once. It consists of a figure with six wings; on five of which there is a mirror. On the second mirror the following inscription appears: 'I am the doorway to all of God's mysteries', *Book of Divine Works*, p. 210.

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*spirit, transport, and ecstasy*'.<sup>265</sup> Mechtild of Magdeburg sees the soul 'soaring like an eagle'.<sup>266</sup>

Further to symbolise the soul's ecstatic journey, the flight is related to knowledge. Hildegard identifies four means by which the soul can fly – the senses (*sensus*), knowledge (*scientis*), will (*voluntas*), and understanding (*intellectus*) – and illustrates the quality of each means which is provided with wings.<sup>267</sup> Flight with an eagle is also associated with knowledge in poetry. Whilst asleep, Dante is lifted up to the next stage in Purgatory by an eagle.<sup>268</sup> This flight is echoed in *The House of Fame* wherein the poet is snatched by the eagle which instructs him on the theory of sound whilst lifting him up to the House of Fame (see pp. 193 ff.).

### ***Traits of the Mystical Experience***

#### **'Hidden' – Mysticism**

Language is one of the main issues to be confronted when examining the field of the mystical experience. Among the common traits that the mystics agree upon is the impossibility of finding the words expressing the core of the journey to the beyond. The reasons for this impossibility are twofold. In some cases, after the soul ascends to the ultimate reality, the words are lacking and the human nature is left alone with

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<sup>265</sup> *Teresa of Avila: The Book of my Life*, M. Starr trans., Boston, Shambhala Publications, 2007, ch. 20, p. 137. The same association of ecstasy with 'the flight of the spirit' is found in *Il castello interiore*, Milano, Paoline, 2010, p. 166.

<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Petroff, pp. 217-8, from Mechtild's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. The eagle is a messenger from Christ in the visions of Hadewijch of Brabant, see Petroff, pp. 15, 197-8.

<sup>267</sup> 'Through the wings of understanding the soul at last knows the fruitfulness of all kinds of activity. [...] Through these four wings the soul has eyes. In the knowledge of goodness, it flies forward like a bird toward good deeds; in the knowledge of evil, it flies backward to do evil', *Book of Divine Work*, p. 120.

<sup>268</sup> *Purg.*, IX, 41.

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the unutterable. In others the mystics are not permitted to reveal their experience, since it must be kept 'hidden'.

The *Cloud*-author addresses this issue explicitly. When in contemplation, he explains, God may sometimes send a beam of light of understanding through the cloud dividing Him from the contemplative and show some of His 'privete', mysteries. Human beings cannot and may not speak of the divine mysteries.<sup>269</sup> The author emphasises that the fire of love that the contemplative will feel is 'fer more then I kan telle thee, or may, or wile, at this tyme'.<sup>270</sup> Even though he dared, he would not speak of the work that pertains to God; conversely he will speak of the work of the human beings, given that it is less dangerous.<sup>271</sup> The author foregrounds the ability as well as the permission to speak twice: 'man may not, ne kan not', and 'I kan telle thee, or may'.<sup>272</sup> Whereas the ineffable pertains to the ability of the human nature to express what the contemplatives experience, what is and should remain hidden from the non-perfect is the very core of mysticism. This concept of being 'hidden' represents its etymological sense that in Middle English is rendered by the term 'hid', as the translation of *Theologia Mystica* into *Deonise Hid Diuinite* shows. The Prologue of the *Cloud* is consistent with the etymological concept of mysticism. The author instructs the possessor of his work, 'I charge thee and I beseche thee', for it to remain within the circle of those who are 'in the sovereynne point of contemplatif leving', in this life.<sup>273</sup> The concept of 'hidden' recurs in the writings of other mystics.

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<sup>269</sup> '[S]chewe thee sum of His priveté, the whiche man may not, ne kan not, speke', *Cloud*, ch. 26, ll. 1139-40.

<sup>270</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 26, ll. 1141-2.

<sup>271</sup> 'For of that werke that fallith to only God dar I not take upon me to speke with my blabryng fleschely tonge; and shortly to say, althof I durst, I wolde not. Bot of that werk that falleth to man, whan he felith him sterid and holpin by grace, list me wel telle thee; for therein is the lesse peril of the two', *Cloud*, ch. 26, ll. 1142-45.

<sup>272</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 26, ll. 1140-41.

<sup>273</sup> *Cloud*, Prologue, l. 15.



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In the last chapter of Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* the term 'hid' appears seven times.

Julian states that her revelations are full of secrets.<sup>274</sup>

At a first reading of Margery's book she may be identified as a talkative elderly woman rather than a mystic.<sup>275</sup> On further analysis Margery shows a certain degree of reticence regarding the most sacred aspects of her revelations. Although to think of Margery in terms of reticence is unexpected, it is worth consideration as it throws new light on her works and her life. Often Margery omits to divulge the content of the revelations from God and this attitude is consistent throughout her book. Reticence occurs when Margery deliberately withholds content from the narration of her experience. This is the case at the outset of her book when after instructing her, God tells her to go to the anchorite in Lynn and disclose the 'confidences and counsels'<sup>276</sup> that he has just revealed to her and do as the anchorite suggests. It could be assumed that the revelations that Margery reports to the anchorite consist of what she has just narrated, and yet, what she reports to the anchorite may not coincide with this.

Throughout *the Book*, Margery's reticent attitude towards the persons she addresses does not alter. She is always very careful in scrutinising those in front of her before disclosing her revelations.<sup>277</sup> Sometimes God forbids Margery to tell the friar the

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<sup>274</sup> 'For the privities of the Revelation ben hidd therein, notwithstanding that al the shewing am ful of privities', Julian, *Shewing*, LV, ch. 51, ll. 2022-3.

<sup>275</sup> On the difference between Margery as author and her fictional character see L. Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, University Park, Pa, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, ch. 2.

<sup>276</sup> '[M]y prevyneys and my counsels', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 5, l. 393.

<sup>277</sup> On one particular occasion she speaks only after she feels sure the priest is a good man: 'So be holy dalyawns and communycacyon sche felt wel he was a good man. And than sche, discuryng the prevytye of hert, revelyd what grace God wrowt in hir sowle thorw hys holy inspiracyon and sumwhat of hir maner of levyng', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 40, ll. 2265-7.

secret counsels revealed to her.<sup>278</sup> Other times she only partially reveals her experience, or none at all.<sup>279</sup> Therefore it could be reasonably argued that there is a secret part that Margery does not tell us, but rather only to her confessors. Yet, in two other cases Margery reports that she has never disclosed the content of her experience, because it was extremely marvellous and high.<sup>280</sup> In fact, Margery does not share her revelations with anyone. She needs to have confirmation from her inner feelings and then she decides how much to reveal, if anything at all. The readers cannot be sure they are receiving all the narration of her 'feelings' in the same way that the priests cannot be sure they receive Margery's confidences (for the meaning of 'feeling' see p. 122). The unsaid in Margery's case, what should not be divulged in vain, leads to the etymology of the term 'mystic' (see p. 63).

## The Ineffable

When the contemplatives wish – and are allowed – to illustrate the higher stages of their experience, they often find that words are not adequate.<sup>281</sup> Human intellect is not able to 'tell' the highest vision, therefore Julian decides not to register those words in her account on the basis that every person receives the degree of knowledge

<sup>278</sup> 'I warne the that thu telle hym not of the prevy counsel which I have schewyd to the, for I wille not that he here it of thy mowth', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 63, ll. 3693-95. It is worth remarking that also in this case the same terms are employed: secret counsels. A similar command is reported in Albericus' vision: he is transported to a place surrounded by a wall, from where he can see inside. However, he is not allowed to reveal what he saw, see Le Goff, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, p. 211.

<sup>279</sup> When she was addressed by a 'worschepful clerk [...], a doctowr of divinité' who inquires about the reason why she wept and cried, she declares: 'Than sche teld hym many gret cawsys of hir wepyng and yet sche teld hym of no revelacyon', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 67, ll. 3900-01.

<sup>280</sup> The first time God's mother speaks and teaches to her. 'Sche tawt this creatur and informyd hir so wondyrfully that sche was abaschyd to speke it or telle it to any, the maters wer so hy and so holy, saf only to the ankyr which was hir princypal confessor, for he cowde most skyl in swech thyngys', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 21, ll. 1144-1146. The second wonderful revelation occurs in Jerusalem: 'Aftyrwardys sche was howselyd on the Mownt of Calvarye, and than sche wept, sche sobbyd, sche cryed so lowde that it wondyr was to heryn it. Sche was so ful of holy thowtys and medytacyons and holy contemplacyons in the Passyon of owyr Lord Jhesu Crist and holy dalyawns that owyr Lord Jhesu Crist dalyed to hir sowle that sche cowde nevyr expressyn hem aftyr, so hy and so holy thei weryn', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 29, ll. 1656-61.

<sup>281</sup> Julian maintains: 'The nombre of the words passyth my witte and al my understandyng and al my mights, and it am the heyest, as to my syte. For therin is comprehendid, I cannot tellyn - but the joy that I saw in the shewyng of them passyth al that herte may willen and soule may desire; and therefore the words be not declaryd here. But every man, after the grace that God gevyth him in understandyng and lovyng, receive hem in our Lords menyng', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 26, ll. 924-9.

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according to God's will. Rolle often expresses his being at a loss with words: it is easier, he declares, to achieve the state of bliss than to speak about it.<sup>282</sup> The joy felt in this stage of contemplation goes beyond all senses, not only the faculty of language.<sup>283</sup> This is particularly true for Rolle, as his mystical experience involves hearing heavenly music.<sup>284</sup> Rolle conflates the traits of the highest degree of contemplation as seen in Hilton's work: to perceive the angelic presence, to know God completely, to love him perfectly, to see his brightness, and 'with unspekable and wunderful joyinge and melodie to loove him withouten ende'.<sup>285</sup> Margery Kempe witnesses the difficulty of communication between the mystical and the ordinary states. She admits that she cannot tell how wonderful the divine teachings are and that the true feeling of that experience cannot be expressed by human words, not even by the contemplatives who wrote about it. Her experience was so wonderful that she had never heard anything similar in Hilton's, or St Bride's book, in *Stimulus Amoris*, nor in *Incendium Amoris*.<sup>286</sup>

Mystics by experience emphasise that their use of words, which usually convey a material meaning, must be interpreted in a spiritual manner. Hilton illustrates the four levels of interpreting the Holy Scriptures;<sup>287</sup> the *Cloud*-author widely exposes how to interpret his words in a spiritual way.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> 'It es mikel lightar to come to þat blys þan for to tell it', Rolle, *The Form of Living*, Allen ed., p. 96, ll. 47-8.

<sup>283</sup> Rolle declares that 'þe wonderfull joy of þe kyngdom of heven, thyrd es mare þan tong may tell, or hert mai thynk, or egh may se, or ere may here', *Form of Living*, ch. 6, p. 102, ll. 201-3.

<sup>284</sup> When speaking of that music he declares that: 'If þou will wytt whatkyn joy þat sang has, I say þe þat na man wate, bot he or scho þat feles it [...]. If þou may wyn þartill, þou sall witt of mare joy þan I have talde þe [þ i]tt', Rolle, *Form of Living*, ch. 8, pp. 106-7, ll. 71-3; 91-2.

<sup>285</sup> Rolle, *Mending of Life*, 1994, p. 23.

<sup>286</sup> '[N]e non other that evyr sche herd redyn that spak so hyly of lofe of God but that sche felt as hyly in werkyng in hir sowle yf sche coud or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 17, ll. 900-2.

<sup>287</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 43.

<sup>288</sup> *Cloud*, ch. 51, ll. 58-59.

*Time and Space*

When does contemplation take place? And where does it occur? From the mystics' accounts it is evident that within the liturgical calendar these phenomena are related to its more significant moments, such as Advent, Lent (the period of Christ's Passion), Easter, and Pentecost. In particular they occur during the celebration of the Mass.<sup>289</sup> Eucharist is the focal moment of the Mass and it is then that the mystical event takes place. It was considered as a magical moment by popular piety, whereas for saints it was strictly related to contemplative phenomena.<sup>290</sup> Lent, with the devotion to Passion, is strictly related to contemplative experiences. Margery's outbursts of tears and divine conversation originate during the procession on Good Friday, Holy Thursday, Palm Sunday, and Easter.<sup>291</sup> Her first ecstatic experience takes place during Advent, the Friday before Christmas, when Christ 'ravysched hir spyryt', and also on Candlemas, when 'hir mende was raveschyd into beholdyng of owr Lady'.<sup>292</sup> On this festivity the fervour of love is particularly violent so much so that she is not able to carry her candle and cannot stand on her feet.<sup>293</sup> These experiences take place within the liturgical context in the church or in procession heading into the church. Margery reports Palm Sunday's rite of the opening of the

<sup>289</sup> On the relevance of the liturgical calendar on the structure of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, see N. K. Yoshikawa. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* recommends:

Efter þe measse cos hwen þe preost sacred þer for 3 eoted  
al þe world þer beoð al ut of bodi þer I sperclinde  
luue biclupped ower leofman þe in to ower breostes

bur is iliht of heouene [...] [After the kiss of peace in the Mass, when the priest communicates, forget the world, be completely out of the body, and with burning love embrace your Beloved who has come down from heaven to your heart [...]], *Ancrene Wisse*, 21. 18-23, quoted in Glasscoe, *Games*, p. 23.

<sup>290</sup> For instances of mystical experiences associated to eucharist, see R. Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls, Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, pp. 170 ff. See also Glasscoe recalling Catherine of Siena, Christina Mirabilis and Mary of Oignies, *Games*, p. 40.

<sup>291</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, chs. 57, 78; ch. 73; ch. 78; Bk II, ch. 3 respectively.

<sup>292</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 5, l. 368; Bk. I, ch. 82, ll. 4698-9 respectively.

<sup>293</sup> She 'went waveryng on eche syde as it had ben a dronkyn woman, wepyng and sobbyng so sor that unethe sche myht stondyn on hir feet for the fervowr of lofe and devocyon that God putte in hir sowle thorw hy contemplacyon', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 82, ll. 4707-09. Margery often characterises the kind of contemplation she is experiencing, specifying 'high' or 'true' contemplation. By employing these terms she appears to follow Hilton's degrees of contemplation.

church door, when the procession of people followed the priest into the temple. The following ceremony must have been performed in an utterly dramatic manner: the priest lifting up the cloth covering the crucifix three times, each time higher than the previous until the people could finally see it. Margery's mind is 'al holy takyn owt of al erdly thyngys and set al in gostly thyngys' so much so that she 'saw owr Lord Crist Jhesu as verily in hir sowle wyth hir gostly eye as sche had seyn befor the crucifixe wyth hir bodily eye'.<sup>294</sup>

Liturgy represents the framework within which the mystical event finds its way into everyday life of people who did not live a contemplative life.<sup>295</sup> The church, like any temple, represents the interruption of the profane space by the sacred space where the rites are celebrated (see pp. 69 ff.). Similarly the festivity interrupts the profane time to make it possible for the sacred time to commence. It is evident then that the visionary phenomena mystics undergo take place mostly in a sacred space during a sacred time. The journey itself of the contemplatives can be compared to a rite of passage. It is a hard, tormented way, in that it is a journey leading to the centre of themselves, 'from the profane to the sacred', from illusion to reality and from humanity to divinity. Accessing the 'centre' is tantamount to an initiation.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 78, ll. 4434-5, and ll. 4438-40 respectively.

<sup>295</sup> According to Glasscoe, liturgy is a rite of passage towards understanding for those who did not have a deep grasping of the 'reality of faith', and a means by which the individual felt the bond of the community, Glasscoe, *Games*, p. 23. There the expression 'rite of passage' is employed to refer to a shift only occurring within the level of ordinary reality (understanding and community). In contrast liturgy, as a rite of passage, represents a passage into a different reality of space-time. The fundamental function of the rite of passage is to make the individual, and in particular the profane, aware that they are stepping into another level of reality. It is a warning of the possible dangers deriving from entering the sacred without the due preparation and without the appropriate movements, Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, Torino, Boringhieri, 2007, p. 336. See also *Cloud*, ch. 26, l. 1145. The two spheres of the profane and of the sacred are clearly differentiated, therefore the passage from one to the other is marked by rites as well as by margins, see van Gennep, *Riti di passaggio*, pp. 3, 16. Hence the importance of the threshold of the temple marked by the gate/door, see Eliade, *Trattato*, p. 336.

<sup>296</sup> Eliade, *Trattato*, p. 347.

## 6. *Terms Expressing States of Consciousness*

Having outlined the degrees of contemplation, the images through which the experience is expressed, and the difficulty that the communication between the worlds implies, it is appropriate to analyse both the state of consciousness as it is described by the mystics, and the terms and expressions mostly employed to define it.

### Wakefulness and Sleep

In some cases the mystics make clear whether the vision took place in sleep or waking. Hildegard states from the beginning that her visions do not occur while she is asleep but rather when she is fully awake.<sup>297</sup> She also indicates that she did not receive her visions while in a state of ecstasy nor in sleep.<sup>298</sup> Julian's revelations manifest themselves while she is awake. Conversely it is when she is asleep that she receives the ugly revelation, unlike any of the others,<sup>299</sup> as when she falls asleep the devil tries to strangle her.<sup>300</sup> God gives Julian the grace to wake up, thus interrupting the torment of the devil.<sup>301</sup> Afterwards the working of the devil vanishes alongside Julian's sickness and fear.<sup>302</sup>

Margery's visions present similar fundamental traits. All take place in a church, when she is either at prayer or absorbed in meditation or contemplation. As Margery herself points out this kind of 'visyons and felyngys' take place soon after her conversion when she could finally lead a chaste life and she spent mornings and

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<sup>297</sup> '[V]igilans corpore et mente' [awake in the body and in the mind], *De operatione Dei*, PL 197, 742A.

<sup>298</sup> '[E]t non in somnis, nec in extasi', *De operatione Dei*, PL 197, 742B.

<sup>299</sup> '[A]nd than I gan to slepyng', 'This oggley shewing was made slepyng, and so was non other', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 66, ll. 2768, 2778 respectively.

<sup>300</sup> 'And in the slepe at the begynnynge, methowte the fend set him in my throte', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 66, l. 2769.

<sup>301</sup> '[O]ur curtes Lord gave me grace to waken', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 66, ll. 2779-80.

<sup>302</sup> '[W]ithouten sekenes of body or drede of conscience', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 66, ll. 2789-90.

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afternoons in church, particularly during Lent.<sup>303</sup> She differentiates visions she had before and after she went to Jerusalem. After her pilgrimage to the holy land, her meditation and contemplation<sup>304</sup> shifted from Christ's manhood to his divinity. Thus her affection and devotion became more fervent in love and her understanding more subtle. Margery emphasises that these visions occurred in a kind of sleep. The first time she defines it as 'a lityl slomeryng':<sup>305</sup> her eyes were closed as if she should sleep, although she could not choose otherwise. Another time 'sodeynly sche was in a maner of slep'<sup>306</sup> and soon after she had a vision with her spiritual eye; in the last episode Margery's eyes close.<sup>307</sup> In the three cases Margery defines this state, which occurs suddenly, as 'a kind of sleep', a state similar to sleep, a slumber but not sleep, although her eyes are closed.<sup>308</sup> The eyes closed are related with contemplation (see ch. 1, p. 40).

It grabs one's attention that Margery also describes the posture she was maintaining: she was kneeling; she lay still; and she was standing. This is not the only time she notices it; in other moments Margery states that she was still.<sup>309</sup> This is notable given that during the ecstatic vision received in Advent, God himself orders Margery how to pray. Among his directives he warns her to abandon reciting the rosary; to pray until six o'clock; to lie still and speak to Him in thought.<sup>310</sup> This is more remarkable

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<sup>303</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 85, l. 4957.

<sup>304</sup> '[H]ir meditacyon and hir contemplacyon', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 85, l. 4968.

<sup>305</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 85, l. 4911.

<sup>306</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 85, ll. 4940-1.

<sup>307</sup> '[H]ir ey ledys went a lityl togedyr wyth a maner of slep', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 85, ll. 4972-3.

<sup>308</sup> Another instance of vision occurring with eyes closed in a state which is not sleep is Wetti's vision. When he was ill, he saw an angel who led him along a path to a high mountain from where he could see the torments of the damned souls. When he woke up he dictated his vision. See Le Goff, *La nascita del Purgatorio*, p. 131.

<sup>309</sup> See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Bk. I, chs 35, 87, and 88. Rolle specifies that he prefers the sitting posture while meditating as he can find more rest, see *The Form of Living*, ch. 10, p. 116.

<sup>310</sup> 'And dowtyr, I wyl thow leve thi byddyng of many bedys and thynk swych thowtys as I wyl putt in thi mend. I schal gevyn the leve to byddyn tyl sex of the cloke to sey what thow wyld. Than schalt

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given that this ecstatic experience marks the passage from vocal prayer to meditation. Leaving the praying of the beads for a manner of praying expressed in thoughts recalls the traits of meditation illustrated by Hilton (see *The third degree of prayer*, p. 85). On the same occasion God's promise 'I schal gefe to the hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon' would confirm the ascent to a superior level of contemplation.<sup>311</sup>

Margery's memory of the content of the visions is rather feeble. If her confessor spoke to her soon after she stood up from her contemplation or meditation, she could tell him some of the conversation she had with God, and what God had communicated to her soul. Otherwise, after a short time she forgot most of her experience. This observation is relevant inasmuch as it recalls the oneiric experience. The content and the feeling of the dream is usually retained mostly in the period of time soon following the dream, sleep, and in the first stage of the waking, whereas the more the consciousness enters the world of the waking, the more it detaches from the oneiric.<sup>312</sup>

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thow ly stylye and speke to me be thowt, and I schal gefe to the hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Bk. I, ch. 5, ll. 389-92.

<sup>311</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Bk. I, ch. 5, l. 392. Glasscoe notices in passing that there are 'humourously shrewd observations on pious posturing' in the *Cloud, Games*, p. 165. As to posture and gestures, Dorothy of Montau used to accompany her meditation with physical movements that reminded of the actual passion of Christ. According to Dorothy's biographer this technique aimed at improving the concentration of the soul, see Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, pp. 117-8.

<sup>312</sup> 'Yyf on of hir confessorwrys come to hir whan sche ros up newly fro hir contemplacyon er ellys fro hir medytacyon, sche cowde a telde hym meche thyng of the dalyawnce that owr Lord dalyid to hir sowle, and in a schort tyme aftyr sche had forgetyn the most party therof and ny everydeel', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Bk. I, ch. 83, ll. 4794-97. Memory is crucial to poets who have stepped into the other world and whose task is to narrate their vision, hence their invocation to the Muses to grant them memory to recall. Also the shamans, when they 'return' from the initiatory rites, have to remember some knowledge, be it the cosmogony, information concerning the present or the future, see Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, p. 14. On memory as link and means of continuity between worlds see ch. 1, p. 46 note 231.



## Meditation and Contemplation

The words by which mystics relate to ecstasy are many; however, the experience is one. This section aims to sum up the main ideas so far dealt with through a brief revision of terms and expressions employed in reference to the mystical experience.<sup>313</sup> Nevertheless a reflection on the relevant words will be helpful also in light of further terminology analysis in literary texts of the period.<sup>314</sup>

The stages towards contemplation (see ch. 1, p. 43), *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, *contemplatio*, are related to the Middle English 'biholding'.<sup>315</sup> However, from what has been seen so far it would appear that 'meditatio' is either rendered as 'meditacioun' or 'thynking'. The association meditation-thinking is evident when the instruction of reading the Scriptures, praying, and meditation are rendered into Middle English by Rolle as 'reding, preyinge, and meditacioun'.<sup>316</sup> The same correspondence is confirmed by the *Cloud*-author (see above, Contemplative life, p. 82). Rolle employs 'biholding' to describe the highest stage of contemplation. Biholding is central in Julian's work, as her visions represent theological truths. In her experience 'biholding' is closely related to God's will of 'showing'.<sup>317</sup> Thus the association biholding, contemplation would maintain the common basic meaning of 'seeing'.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Glasscoe remarks that 'To define in general terms the *precise* connotations of words used by individual writers to clarify their understanding of the development of contemplative life is to walk a mine-field', 'Time of Passion: Latent Relationships between Liturgy and Meditation in two Middle English Mystics', in *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval Religious Tradition. Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey*, ed. H. Phillips, Cambridge, Brewer, 1990, pp. 144-5.

<sup>314</sup> The brevity of this section is due to the presence of the fundamental work by Riehle on the Middle English mystics, which covers the terms and experience in an exhaustive way, and on which this section is mainly based.

<sup>315</sup> Riehle, p. 124.

<sup>316</sup> See Rolle, *The Mendynge of Lyffe*, p. 18; *The Cloud of Unknowing*, where 'Lecture, Meditation, Orison' become 'reading, thinking, and praying', ch. 58.

<sup>317</sup> Riehle, p. 125.

<sup>318</sup> From old French *contempler*, Latin *contemplare*, 'to survey, observe, behold, consider, contemplate', formed from *con* + *templum* 'an open place for observation, marked out by the augur with his staff'. OED, 'contemplate'. Latin 'contemplatio' translates the Greek *θεωρία*. Both convey the meaning of 'sight'. 'Temple' was a sacred space from where birds or the weather were observed in order to derive

Contemplation is also expressed by 'siȝt', 'sight', which maintains the meaning of seeing. 'Siȝt', one of the central terms of mystical writing defining the soul's vision of the divinity, is associated with understanding and knowing.<sup>319</sup> Further, 'siȝt' is employed to describe the vision. Julian differentiates between 'bodily syght', which would correspond to Augustine's *visio corporalis*, and 'goostely syght', related to *visio intellectualis*.<sup>320</sup>

## Ecstasy

The rare use of the term 'ecstasy' in Middle English mirrors the infrequent use of 'exstasis' in Latin works, where 'excessus' is preferred. This preference derives from the expression 'mente excedere' employed in reference to St Paul's rapture (2 Cor. 5:13). The equivalence 'Exstasim, id est mentis excessum' is set by Hugh of St Victor.<sup>321</sup> 'Excessus' is also employed by Bernard of Clairvaux, and by Richard of St Victor for whom 'excessus mentis' represents the highest stage of contemplation.<sup>322</sup> 'Extasim' occurs once in Middle English texts in Rolle's *Emendatio vitae*, where the term is not explained and seems to be used as synonym of 'raptus'. It is rendered into Middle English by Misyn, Rolle's translator, as 'trans', from Latin 'transitus',<sup>323</sup> which

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omens. See S. Bhattacharji, 'Medieval Contemplation and Mystical Experience', in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed., D. Dyas, V. Edden, R. Ellis, Cambridge, Brewer, 2005, p. 51.

<sup>319</sup> Riehle, pp. 123-4.

<sup>320</sup> Riehle, p. 125. Of the Middle English mystics, Julian and the author of the *Chastising of God's Children* are the ones who made use of the threefold distinction of visions which correspond to Augustine's, *visio corporalis*, *visio imaginativa*, *visio intellectualis*, Riehle, p. 125.

<sup>321</sup> Quoted in Riehle, p. 92.

<sup>322</sup> Riehle, p. 93. See also Richard's three degrees of *dilatatio*, *sublevatio* or *elevatio*, and *excessus mentis* or *mentis alienatio* in the previous chapter. Incidentally *dilatatio* is rendered by 'brade', 'enlarge', and 'sprede', see Riehle, p. 94.

<sup>323</sup> Riehle, p. 92.

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conveys the idea of the passage. This meaning is kept in Old French together with the sense of 'departure' in particular from life.<sup>324</sup>

Other Middle English terms conveying the concept of ecstasy are 'excess', a less common term, and 'ouerpassing'. The latter, together with 'passing', appears as a translation of the expression 'excessu tui ipsius': 'þorou þe ouerpassing of þiself'.<sup>325</sup> Misyn also renders 'excessum mentis' by 'passynge of mynde be contemplacion', by which the translator attempts to provide a vernacular rendition for a Latin technical mystical word.<sup>326</sup>

Although in Latin writing 'ecstasy' is usually differentiated from 'raptus', in Middle English 'ravishen' renders 'ecstasy' and keeps the other meanings of 'to be passionately in love', and 'to assault sexually'.<sup>327</sup> Ecstasy is rendered with 'draught' by Margery Kempe and by the *Cloud*-author. 'Ravishen' emphasises the violent ravishing, whereas 'draught' points out the divine attraction that draws the soul.<sup>328</sup> Finally it is relevant to notice that in *Chastising* the ecstatic phenomenon by which the soul is transported is translated as 'swounyng',<sup>329</sup> swooning being a frequent event also in medieval dream visions during which poets faint or lose consciousness.

For Hilton and the *Cloud*-author the ecstatic vision is less relevant than for Rolle, Julian and Margery.<sup>330</sup> It could be argued that further to having experienced a degree of ecstasy Hilton and the *Cloud*-author tend towards writing of systematised teaching;

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<sup>324</sup> OED, 'trance', n.1

<sup>325</sup> Quoted in Riehle, p. 93.

<sup>326</sup> Riehle, p. 93.

<sup>327</sup> Riehle, p. 95. MED, 'ravishen' 2, 3, 4.

<sup>328</sup> Riehle, p. 96.

<sup>329</sup> Riehle, p. 96.

<sup>330</sup> Riehle, p. 96.

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whereas Rolle, Julian, and Margery witness from within the mystical experience consisting of visions.

### Feeling

In Middle English mystics' writing 'feling' does not convey the emotional meaning that it has today. Amongst other meanings, Middle English 'feeling' has the following: 'spiritual or mystical awareness'; and 'foreknowledge; divine prescience'.<sup>331</sup> It is a technical term of mystical writing conveying the 'ability [...] to experience God through the powers of his soul'.<sup>332</sup> It translates the Latin 'sentire', 'sensatio', and 'sensus'.<sup>333</sup> In Rolle it means both 'savouren' and 'to share the experience' of the Passion.<sup>334</sup> In the *Cloud* the terms 'knowing' and 'feeling' are interchangeable. In Hilton 'gostly feling' can translate 'meditatio'.<sup>335</sup> Visions are also often referred to by using the word 'feling' denoting a sense different from sight.<sup>336</sup> In Margery and Julian 'feling' is a synonym for 'vision', and 'contemplation'.<sup>337</sup>

### 'Daliaunce'

This is considered a mystical technical term, as opposed to the meaning it has acquired today.<sup>338</sup> On one hand it takes on the meaning of 'communion' with the divinity. It is largely employed by Margery who defines by it her communion with God, and the way God conversed with her. Further she uses 'daliaunce' to express

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<sup>331</sup> *MED*, 'feling', 7.

<sup>332</sup> Riehle, p. 112.

<sup>333</sup> Riehle, pp. 110, 112.

<sup>334</sup> Riehle, p. 110.

<sup>335</sup> Riehle, p. 112.

<sup>336</sup> Riehle, p. 112.

<sup>337</sup> Riehle remarks that these two meanings are not acknowledged by the *MED*, pp. 112-3.

<sup>338</sup> 'Amorous toying, (an) idle flirtation', *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2003, 'dalliance'. *MED* reports the following definitions: intimate conversation; spiritual conversation; amorous talk, sexual union, 'daliaunce', 1, 2, 3.

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‘mystical ecstasy’ and ‘contemplation’.<sup>339</sup> On the other hand ‘daliaunce’ can convey the same meaning of ‘communion’ but with a slight erotic nuance, hence ‘amorous talk’. After referring to Christ as the spouse of the soul, Hilton defines the union of the soul with God by this term.<sup>340</sup> In this case ‘daliaunce’ can be interpreted as a conversation between two lovers.<sup>341</sup>

### Privy – Privity

The union with God is attained in solitude and secrecy, which is expressed by ‘privy’ and ‘privity’ that translate the Latin ‘arcanum’, and ‘secretum’— ‘secrecy’ is rarer in Middle English. In Hilton it can be found associated with ‘sight’.<sup>342</sup> Here the experience of contemplation of the Lord, ‘sight’, is referred to as ‘privei’, secret. It is noteworthy that the terms ‘privei’, ‘privetees’, ‘privey’ together with ‘hid’<sup>343</sup> are particularly recurrent in the last chapter of *Scale* where the author wishes to illustrate the mystery of contemplation and of its object. Amongst other meanings ‘privete’ also signifies ‘a sacred mystery, divine secret; revelation’.<sup>344</sup> The secrecy of the experience can be related to the concept of ‘hidden’ God, as has been seen above (see p. 63 and p. 109). ‘Hid’ in addition to render ‘mystical’, also translates Latin ‘absconditum’ as in the expression: ‘verbum absconditum’, ‘hid wurde’.<sup>345</sup> In the light of what has been explored in Margery’s attitude with regard to hidden mysticism, it is

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<sup>339</sup> ‘Her dalyawns was so swet [...] that this creature myt not oftyntymes beryn it but fel down & wrestyd wyth hir body’, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 17, ll. 905-6. Margery expands its meaning to ‘contemplation’ and ‘mystical ecstasy’, see Riehle, p. 103.

<sup>340</sup> ‘Alle thise loveli daliaunces of privei speche atwixe Jhesu and a soule mai be called an hid word’, Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 46, ll. 3573-4.

<sup>341</sup> Riehle, p. 102.

<sup>342</sup> ‘[I]nto privei chambre into the sight of oure Lord Jhesu’, Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 40, ll. 2959-60.

<sup>343</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. II, ch. 46, l. 3574, l. 3571, l. 3581, ll. 3574, 3576, 3577, 3578, respectively.

<sup>344</sup> *The Book of Revelation*, the *Apocalypse*, is rendered as the *book of privete(s)*, MED, ‘privete’ (n.).

<sup>345</sup> Riehle, p. 118; 163.

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apt to recall that the terms 'counsel' and 'secret' also convey the meaning of secrecy (see 'Hidden' – Mysticism, p. 109).<sup>346</sup>

### Drunkenness and Sobriety

Love is equated to wine in the *Song of Songs*, as Bernard of Clairvaux illustrates. The image is used by Rolle in *Incendium Amoris*, 'Love is the spiritual wine that inebriates the minds of the elected'.<sup>347</sup> The consequence of drinking this wine is the soul becoming inebriated, rendered as 'drunken'. In opposition to drunkenness, the ordinary state of consciousness is described as 'sobre': 'Whether we overpasse oure bodili wittes to God in contemplacion, or we aren more sobre to yow in bodily felynge'.<sup>348</sup>

### Madness

Drunkenness is sometimes found associated with madness. When grace comes abundantly and violently, the contemplative's body moves and turns 'as a man that were mad or dronken and can have noo reste'.<sup>349</sup> Rolle reflects that at times when a true contemplative is ravished into the desirable light, he is considered by other people 'as a fool and unsensible'.<sup>350</sup> Margery is testimony to this troublesome situation, since some of her contemporaries considered her behaviour as an expression of madness, and indeed this view has been upheld by some recent

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<sup>346</sup> 'Counsel' and 'secret' have, amongst others, the following meanings: 'Counsel': a secret, private matter(s), a secret plan. 'Secret': a divine or natural mystery; a method or process in a science or craft which is known only to the initiated; a prayer said in a low voice by the priest after the offertory and before the preface in the Mass, *MED*, 'counsel', 'secret'.

<sup>347</sup> 'Amor est uinum spirituale inebrians mentes electorum'] quoted in Riehle, p. 42.

<sup>348</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 9, ll. 183-4. Drunkenness linked to transitional states within mythical and religious context is found throughout cultures, see for instance G. Dumézil, *Gl'i dèi dei Germani*, Milano, Adelphi, 1988 [1959], pp. 44-49.

<sup>349</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 30, ll. 761-2.

<sup>350</sup> Rolle, *The Mendynge of Lyffe*, p. 23.

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criticism that focuses on her alleged hysteria (see p. 75). While reflecting on language the *Cloud*-author admits that once entered the cloud, the contemplative experiences a 'schortyng of wordes [...] madness & a parfite unresonabiltee'.<sup>351</sup>

### 'Trauail'

The journey towards contemplation is often described as 'trauail'. Hilton warns the novice commencing the journey: 'yif thou wolt, bigynne a newe travaile, and that is for to entre into thyn owen soule bi meditacion'.<sup>352</sup> On another occasion he refers to the practice of meditation as 'al thi travail schal be for to drawe in thi thoughtis fro alle bihooldynges of alle erthli thinges'.<sup>353</sup> This recalls the way the *Cloud*-author defines Moses's journey to the mountain, symbolising his way to contemplation.<sup>354</sup> The author introduces three kinds of contemplative: Moses, Aaron, and Beseleel. Moses represents those who attain contemplation after great efforts, unlike Beseleel who achieves it through teaching, and Aaron who can enter contemplation when he wishes, so 'trauail' denotes the effort made along the arduous path towards contemplation.

### 'Stody'

A short note on the use of 'stody' which Margery Kempe employs during a divine conversation, and is also found in medieval poetry. God cautions her to concentrate her thoughts on loving Him.<sup>355</sup> 'Stody' signifies: mental effort directed toward an end;

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<sup>351</sup> *Hid Divinite*, Hodgson ed., p. 126

<sup>352</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 40, ll. 1063-4.

<sup>353</sup> Hilton, *Scale*, Bk. I, ch. 25, ll. 653-4.

<sup>354</sup> '[F]or alle the clymyng and the travaile that he had into the mounte', *Cloud*, ch. 73, ll. 2435.

<sup>355</sup> '[F]or I schal ordeyn for the, but evyr stody thow to love me and kepe thi mende on me', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch 44, ll. 2489-90.

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a state of deep thought, meditation, contemplation.<sup>356</sup> It is relevant to note the following quotation: 'Sum [dreams] come þurgh grete stody [F cogitaciun]', where 'stody' renders the French form of *cogitatio*.<sup>357</sup> This is of interest as *cogitatio* is one of the stages being identified towards contemplation (see ch. 1, p. 43). Moreover, 'stody' is employed by Rolle when he instructs the novice with regard to the three degrees of love. In the second Rolle warns: 'In þis degre þou sal stody how clene þou be in hert, and how chaste in body'.<sup>358</sup> 'Stody' is translated as 'study'.<sup>359</sup> However, it could be interpreted as a verb related to 'cogitatio', in the sense of the first stage along the path towards contemplation. Thus 'stodie' could be included among the terms defining a transitional state of consciousness, and also appears in medieval dream visions (see pp. 188, 208).

### Dream

In *The Form of Living* dream is employed as the general term meaning 'oneiric phenomenon'. Rolle warns the novice never to relax either in sleep or in waking as the devil can deceive at any moment. As a matter of fact it is during sleep that a number of 'ugly ymages' may frighten, and 'faire ymages' make rejoice in vain. To demonstrate the variety of possibilities that can occur in sleep Rolle explains that the devil's attempts to deceive a soul can pass first through true images seen in sleep followed by deceptive ones, once the soul has been beguiled. By listing six kinds of dream Rolle follows Gregory the Great's classification (see ch. 1, p. 16). The first two kinds are not 'escapable',<sup>360</sup> since they depend on the stomach being too full or too empty; the third consists of 'illusyons' caused by the enemy, the devil; the fourth is a

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<sup>356</sup> MED, 'stodie'.

<sup>357</sup> MED, 'stodie', 4, quotation from Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Sin*.

<sup>358</sup> Rolle, *Ego dormio*, p. 64, ll. 121-2.

<sup>359</sup> See H. E. Allen, *English Writings*, Glossary, p. 177.

<sup>360</sup> 'Twa er, þat na man, haly ne oper, may eschape', Rolle, *Form of Living*, ch. 2, ll. 125-6, p. 93.



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combination of 'thoght before and illusion folouand'; the fifth represents a 'revelacion' of the Holy Ghost; and the sixth is a combination of 'thoghtes' and 'revelacion'.<sup>361</sup>

Nonetheless the same word employed in a different context takes on a different meaning. While speaking of the love demonstrated by someone who always loves completely, Rolle explains that whether s/he is sitting, standing or doing some activities they always meditate, 'thynkand', or 'oftsyth þarof es dremande'.<sup>362</sup> Here 'dreaming' does not relate to the physiological oneiric phenomenon occurring during sleep, but rather is related to 'thynkand'. It could be interpreted as a profound state of consciousness similar to the state of meditation or deeper. One could assume that 'dreaming' is a state similar to meditation, and that it refers to a state belonging to another level of consciousness, that can be achieved while sleeping, and also while awake the mystic withdraws into deep meditation.

## 7. *The Return from the Beyond*

### Rebirth

The end of the ecstatic event is marked by exhaustion, and by the task of communicating the knowledge acquired during the sojourn within the Beyond. Exhaustion is a shared element among mystics. Hildegard states that after her overwhelming visions she trembled all over her body and fell ill.<sup>363</sup> Similar physical effects are experienced by Margery who suffered with violent outbursts of tears, sobbing, and trembling and shaking of her body which her contemporaries

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<sup>361</sup> Rolle, *Form of Living*, ch. 2, ll. 128-133, p. 93.

<sup>362</sup> Rolle, *Ego Dormio*, p. 61, ll. 5-6.

<sup>363</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, p. 5.

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interpreted as epilepsy and today are still considered as symptoms of illness (see above p. 72). 'Rebirth' can be employed as a figurative umbrella term embracing the end of sickness, the beginning of writing, and more generally the process of disseminating the knowledge the contemplative was bestowed during the mystical experience. As the mystic has undergone symbolic death, s/he has acquired and experienced a new birth, a new beginning.

### Healing

Healing is a crucial process in mystics' lives. Julian's sixteenth vision confirms the previous revelations and plays a pivotal role in her journey. After falling asleep she is tempted by the devil, who attempts to strangle her. On waking up, after a brief moment during which she is deceived by the devil's illusion, Julian recalls the divine visions she had that same day.<sup>364</sup> Now she can find 'gret rest and peas withouten sekenes of body or drede of conscience'; her spiritual eye is opened and she can see the Lord seated in the soul.<sup>365</sup> The sickness and healing cycle is central in Hildegard's life. Her disease torments her throughout the years. Nevertheless the abbess is aware of the importance of her state when the divine voice speaking through her asserts the relation between her illness and the gift of visions.<sup>366</sup> Margery is healed from her illness by a vision of Christ, who comforts her and reassures her that He has not forgotten her. Soon after the air opens up and she sees Him rise into the air, and suddenly she returns to her senses.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> '[F]led therto as to my comforte', Julian, *Shewing*, LV, ch. 66, l. 2788.

<sup>365</sup> Julian, *Shewing*, LV, chs. 66, ll. 2789-90; ch. 67 respectively.

<sup>366</sup> '[I]llness is stamped on her [...] to such a degree that she has no stability of body. If things were otherwise, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit could not dwell in her. At times the spirit of God awakens her from this mortal illness with the great power of its kindness as if with a refreshing dew, so that she can continue her life of service to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit', Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, p. 265.

<sup>367</sup> '[T]he creature was stabelyd in hir wyttys and in hir reson as wel as evyr sche was befor', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 1, ll. 176-7.

Sickness and healing are so closely interrelated that they represent a whole process. It can be experienced as a pivotal experience in human life. One could recall Jung's experience of sickness which led him to 'the outermost limit' of life.<sup>368</sup> Within his state of unconsciousness he did not know whether it was a dream or ecstasy; the feeling of extreme happiness was too wonderful to be described; the disappointment when his consciousness came back to the ordinary state; and the foreknowing of the future death of his doctor.<sup>369</sup> His way of narrating his visionary experience very closely recalls what has been explored so far both with regard to the terminology employed in the medieval mystics' writings and to the kind of experience. What is of interest here is that Jung acknowledges that the period after his illness was 'the most fruitful', as his 'principal works were written only then.'<sup>370</sup>

### Teaching and Writing

Recovering from sickness represents the gate to a new stage in life which is often associated with writing and teaching the knowledge acquired. Hildegard is spurred by the divine voice – which sounds utterly imperative – into writing the content of her visions.<sup>371</sup> In the period in which the treatise was written Margery fell ill several times, and yet, as soon as she confronted the task of writing she became 'heil and hoole'.<sup>372</sup> God himself commanded her to be prepared so that she could accomplish her

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<sup>368</sup> C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, London, Fontana Press, 1995, p. 320.

<sup>369</sup> Jung, pp. 320-9.

<sup>370</sup> Jung, p. 328.

<sup>371</sup> 'O wretched creature and daughter of much toil, even though you have been thoroughly seared, so to speak, by countless grave sufferings of the body, the depth of the mysteries of God has completely permeated you. Transmit for the benefit of humanity an accurate account of what you see with your inner eye and what you hear with the inner ear of your soul', Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, p. 5.

<sup>372</sup> *Book*, Bk. I, ch. 89, l. 5216.

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task.<sup>373</sup> For both mystics it is evident that transforming their mystical experience into writing has a therapeutical aspect.

Writing is a fundamental task assigned by God, the aim of which is to disseminate the knowledge the mystics have been bestowed so that humankind can learn and benefit of it. It is God himself who wants humankind to know. His voice sounds markedly authoritative when it resounds in Hildegard's vision.<sup>374</sup> God's intention is clear: 'as a result, human beings should learn how to know their Creator and should no longer refuse to adore God worthily and reverently'.<sup>375</sup> Margery too received the divine command to write. God stated the content to be written: her feelings and revelations, and her form of living.<sup>376</sup> God's voice also specifies the moment when Margery is allowed to write.<sup>377</sup> More than twenty years after her experience, Margery faces the task of transforming her 'feeling' into written words.

Since it is divine knowledge that must be disseminated, the content of the writing does not derive from the mystics themselves. It originates directly from the divinity who speaks through them.<sup>378</sup> The aim of writing that the voice specifies to Margery is

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<sup>373</sup> '[O]ftyn sche was comawndyd to makyn hir redy in al hast', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Bk. I, ch. 89, l. 5217.

<sup>374</sup> 'Write down what I tell you!', Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, p. 6.

<sup>375</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, p. 5.

<sup>376</sup> '[O]wer Lord, he comawnded hyr and chargyd hir that sche schuld don wryten hyr felyngs and revelacyons and the forme of her levyngs', *Book*, The Proem, ll. 64-5.

<sup>377</sup> '[S]che was comawndyd in hir sowle that sche schuld not wrytyn so soone', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, The Proem, ll. 61-2.

<sup>378</sup> The voice Hildegard hears makes this point: 'Therefore, write this down – not as your heart is inclined but rather as my testimony wishes. For I am without any beginning or end of life. This vision has not been contrived by you, nor has it been conceived by any other human being', *Book of Divine Works*, pp. 5-6. The voice from God is a common motif in visionary women's writing of the age. Mechtilde of Magdeburg (1210-1285/91) starts her work with the following words: 'This book is to be joyfully welcomed, for God Himself speaks in it [...] The book proclaims Me alone and shows forth My holiness with praise [...] This book is called The Flowing Light of the Godhead. Ah! Lord God! Who has written this book? I in my weakness have written it, because I dared not hide the gift that is in it', *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, quoted in Petroff, p. 23; see also K. J. Magill, *Julian of Norwich, Mystic or Visionary*, Routledge, 2006, pag. 69. On women mystics who write following the order of the divine voice, see Petroff, pp. 5, 20, 26-7.

similar. God's 'goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle the world'.<sup>379</sup> From the very first lines Margery emphasises that the aim of her treatise consists in giving comfort to and to teach sinful wretches.<sup>380</sup> Instructive teaching is also the purpose of Julian's work. Her 'booke is begunne be Gods gift and His grace'.<sup>381</sup> The reason why God showed her revelations is because He wants humankind to know. It is through knowing that humankind can love Him, and it is because of love that He yielded the revelations.<sup>382</sup> Rolle's aim is to instruct and to reach as many people as possible.<sup>383</sup> Moreover he declares he feels the urge to write, even though he speaks of an unconstrainable strength that incites him to express the fervour felt within the mystical experience.<sup>384</sup> Rolle does not speak of God's voice, but rather of love which compels him. This ungovernable force recalls one of the prophet's qualities, listed by Vincent of Beauvais: the impossibility of keeping silent once the revelation of a superior knowledge is received (see ch. 1, p. 39).

### Up and Down the Ladder

Margery takes her leave from writing her treatise by disclosing one of her personal prayers (Book II, ch. 10). It is a prayer aimed at ascending to God, which expresses a thought for the whole world, including the non-Christians. It is her way to conclude her writing with an ascending voice, as it was a common belief that prayers usually

<sup>379</sup> Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, The Proem, ll. 65-6.

<sup>380</sup> '[T]he hy and unspecabyl mercy of ower sovereign Savyowr Cryst Jhesu [...] alle the werkys of ower Saviowr ben for ower exampyl and instruccyon', Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, The Proem, ll. 2-3, 5-6.

<sup>381</sup> Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 86, l. 3391.

<sup>382</sup> 'For trewly I saw and understode in our Lords mening that He shewid it for He will have it knowen more than it is, in which knowing He will given us grace to loven Him and clevyn to Him', Julian, *Shewings*, LV, ch. 86, ll. 3395-7.

<sup>383</sup> Richard Rolle, *The English Writings*, R. S. Allen trans. and ed., New York, Paulist Press, 1988, pp. 32-3.

<sup>384</sup> 'I speak plainly. I do not fear those who are testing me, for such men will be slaughtered in the whirlwind. I do not know how to keep silent, so much does love constrain me [...] that all should know how adept I am in crying aloud in song and receiving the melodious fire of heaven [...]', *Melos Amoris*, ch. 1, quoted in Richard Rolle, *The English Writings*, p. 34.

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rise.<sup>385</sup> Alongside the ascending movement, a communication originating in the Beyond heading downwards exists too. The divine voice spurring to write the exact words the mystics are told conveys a movement that from above descends towards this world. This bidirectional communication between this world and the Beyond resonates with the similar relationships that linked poets and the Muses.<sup>386</sup> On one hand the poets express their wish for the Muses to yield them inspiration; on the other the Muses' voice can be so imperative that the poets cannot but write.

### Conclusion of Part I

So far the thesis has illustrated the main dream classifications acknowledged in the Middle Ages together with the significance the oneiric phenomenon acquired within the discourse of true knowledge attained through revelatory experiences including ecstasy and *alienatio*, as was established by philosophers and theologians. The stages of the ecstatic experience have also been identified together with the relative terms and the symbolic images expressed by the Middle English mystics. These terms and images indicate progress within the ecstatic state. In the following part of the present study Chaucer's works are examined in order to determine whether Middle English 'drem' conveys the significance of the oneiric creative state which the poet enters when achieving poetic inspiration. Following on from an analysis of how 'drem' within sleep is employed in Chaucer's works and how it impacts on the narrative structure of his works, the following chapters also examine the presence, the function, and the significance of figurative images employed by the mystics that find

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<sup>385</sup> '[I]n preyere thei styen up and offren oure preyerres unto God', Rolle, *The Mending of Life*, ch. 12, p. 18. See also Riehle, who quotes John of Damascus's 'oratio est ascensus mentis ad deum', p. 70.

<sup>386</sup> In ancient Greece the poet receives the gift of poetry from the Muses as a divine gift. In the eighth century B.C. Hesiod claims that 'the Muses [...] breathed a voice into me, and power to sing the story of things of the future, and things past', *Theogony* 31-34, Lattimore ed., 1959, p. 124, quoted in Leavitt, p. 10. On the association between poetry and divine inspiration see also Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, pp. 14 ff.

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space in Chaucer's works. It should be noted, however, that the texts so far examined have not been presented in order to suggest that they represent actual and direct borrowing from Chaucer's part. The thesis aims to widen the perspective from which to look at Chaucer's literary texts in order to find connections that are not always expressed explicitly by authors. It is a study of the experiences, the concepts, and the terms related to the oneiric discourse as they were diffused at the time and it aims to demonstrate how these concepts and the ascending narrative structure were embedded in the cultural context.

Several aspects that have arisen along the present review of mystics' experience and writing are also present in medieval poetry. The concluding ascending prayer reverberates in the custom of medieval poets, who take leave from their own book, to go to the beloved and into the world. Similarly, the therapeutical function of writing has been underscored by medieval poets too.<sup>387</sup> In the traditional cultures (see p. 69) the priest was also healer, seer and poet. From the unique inner experience made possible by the pre-ecstatic inspiration the mystical as well as the poetic languages have stemmed.<sup>388</sup> What is left, if anything, of the ecstatic inspiration in medieval poetry? Exploring the relationship between poets and the 'Beyond', and how medieval poetry, with particular reference to Chaucer's works, expresses the

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<sup>387</sup> See for instance the Proem to *Filostrato* where the poet explains that it is his intention to discharge his bosom from sadness caused by his beloved's departure. So he commences to sing his own pain, 'cantando narrare li miei martiri', Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, Milano, Mondadori, 1964, vol. 2, p. 21. Both in *Filostrato* and *Teseida*, Boccaccio takes leave from his works, see part 9 of *Filostrato*, pp. 226-28, and the final sonnet with the Muses' response in *Teseida*, pp. 663-4. Chaucer takes leave from *TC* commencing with the line 'Go, litel bok, litel myn tragedye', V, l. 1786, further both *TC* and *CT* end with a prayer and the final word is 'Amen'.

<sup>388</sup> 'When the shaman prepares his trance, he [...] calls his helping spirits, speaks a 'secret language' or the language of the animals, he imitates the animals' sounds and above all the birds' singing. He attains a 'second state' which triggers the linguistic creation and the rhythm of lyric poetry', Eliade, *Lo sciamanesimo*, p. 540. See also Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy*, p. 14. On the function of the poets in traditional societies, see for instance M. W. Bloomfield, and C. W. Dunn, *The Role of the Poet in Early Societies*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1989.

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transitional states of consciousness from ordinary awareness to oneiric poetry is the focus of the next chapters.



## **PART II**

## Chapter 3 – Dream Visions

### Introduction

After investigating the medieval world of dreams as they were classified by philosophers and the mystical progress towards the true knowledge as illustrated by mystics, this part explores the significance that the term 'drem' acquires within the context of dream visions and investigates how the mystical discourse could have influenced Chaucer's works.

The abundant production of dream-visions in the period 1350-1400 has been generally acknowledged.<sup>1</sup> Over time critics have referred to them as dream poetry,<sup>2</sup> 'dream visions',<sup>3</sup> and 'love-visions'.<sup>4</sup> The seminal studies by Curry and Spearing have shed light respectively on the medieval classifications of oneiric phenomena as studied by astrologers, physicians and theologians, and provided an exhaustive survey on works written between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries.

Curry acknowledges the importance of medieval 'sciences', although some of them are not considered as such today. As Curry puts it, in order to make sense of the period as well as of its literary works it is fundamental to 'reconstruct [...] the whole system of these despised pseudo-sciences'.<sup>5</sup> Moreover by identifying the three

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<sup>1</sup> P. Brown ed., *Reading Dreams: the Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 22. See also K. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form*, Stanford, Calif. Stanford University Press, 1988, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> W. Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994. R. W. Frank, *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> D. Bethurum, 'Chaucer's Point of View as Narrator in the Love Poems', in *Chaucer Criticism: an Anthology*, R. J. Schoeck and J. Taylor eds., Vol 2, 'Troilus and Criseyde' & The Minor Poems, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1960, pp. 211-231. See also P. G. Ruggiers, 'The Unity of Chaucer's *House of Fame*', in *Chaucer Criticism: an Anthology*, vol. 2, pp. 261-274.

<sup>5</sup> W. C. Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, rev. and enlarged ed., originally published by Oxford University Press, 1926, London, Allen & Unwin, 1960, p. xix.

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categories of *somnium naturale*, *animale*, and *coeleste* he provided the terminology that has since been applied to describe Chaucer's literary dreams, even though Curry's sources postdate Chaucer and there is no evidence that Chaucer knew this classification.<sup>6</sup> Within the heterogeneity of the genre, Spearing defines his selection as 'poems whose main substance is a dream vision or vision, *dreamt* invariably by the "I" of the poem'.<sup>7</sup> Further to these Newman's study investigates the classical inheritance and analyses its impact upon the medieval dream vision.<sup>8</sup>

More recent studies focus on the psychological patterns underlying medieval dreams. This interest combines with the medieval debate on dream interpretation and on truth and falsehood (see p. 152). In the concluding decades of last century a psychoanalytic approach has been common<sup>9</sup> and terms including 'manifest', 'latent dream content', and 'day residue' have become frequent.<sup>10</sup> Elements epitomising the sorrowful lover, including the lack of sleep that identified signs of love sickness, are considered as symptoms pertaining to the psychoanalytic sphere. The poetic persona is said to show 'psychic disorder', 'psychic depression',<sup>11</sup> mental 'anguish', 'turmoil', and 'distress'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>7</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> F. X. Newman, *Somnium: Medieval Theories of Dreaming and the Form of Vision Poetry*, Princeton University Ph.D. thesis, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 58, 62; P. Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory*, London, Edward Arnold, 1971, pp. 1 ff, 158 ff. .

<sup>10</sup> C. B. Hieatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and his Contemporaries*, The Hague, Paris, Mouton & Co, 1967, p. 53; W. Calin, pp. 215, 279; J. S. Russell, *The English Dream Vision. Anatomy of a Form*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1988, p. 59, for instance.

<sup>11</sup> Calin, pp. 277-8.

<sup>12</sup> Piehler, respectively pp. 15, 47, 144. The tendency to medicalisation emerges in defining the persona in *BD* as suffering from insomnia rather than 'lack of sleep', see p. 163.

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When it is not deemed as a convention, the dream has been explained on the basis of its functions.<sup>13</sup> Because of their unpredictable nature dreams can provide solutions to problematic situations: the poet can address the aristocrat belonging to a higher social rank,<sup>14</sup> he can realise unexpected turns in the narration<sup>15</sup>, and add 'apparently incongruous material'.<sup>16</sup> They represent the poet's detachment from reality, when he suffers from love sorrows,<sup>17</sup> and by adding ultrafantastic experience, including journeys through hell and the otherworld,<sup>18</sup> and represent the 'in-betweenness' of the worlds.<sup>19</sup> Reporting the dream or acting as a scribe to someone else's dream is a way for the poet to disclaim responsibility for the content of the upcoming narration.<sup>20</sup> The poet is able to recreate their lives, as beloved who died are made to live again through the poem.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> N. K. Chadwick maintains that the dream framework is only partially a literary convention, see 'Dreams in Early European Literature', in *Celtic Studies, Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson, 1912-1962*, J. Carney and D. Greene eds., London, Routledge, 1968, pp. 33-50, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, refers to Machaut p. 44, and the poet in BD p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> J. Lawlor, 'The Earlier Poems', in *Chaucer and Chaucerians. Critical Studies in Middle English Literature*, D. S. Brewer ed., London, Nelson, 1966, pp. 39-64, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> P. Brown, 'On the Borders of Middle English Dream Vision', in *Reading Dreams*, P. Brown ed., p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> D. Bethurum maintains that dreams are two degrees away from reality in that they occur as visions within a poem, 'Chaucer's Point of View', pp. 214-5.

<sup>18</sup> R. W. Frank, *Legend of Good Women*, p. 4. Spearing maintains that many of the conventions in medieval literature are 'not-realistic', *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 2. The term 'reality' is found implicitly conveying the contemporary readers' concept of the term that excludes more evanescent aspects that in contrast were deemed as belonging to 'reality' in the Middle Ages. Erickson confronts the different concepts of 'reality' and maintains that the medieval concept of reality was more widely inclusive than the modern: 'Visions defined reality', whereas from the modern perspective a visionary sees 'what is not there', C. Erickson, *The Medieval Vision, Essays in History and Perception*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1976, chs. 1, 2, in particular pp. 29-30. Here one is in front of a term the significance of which would be worth clarifying.

<sup>19</sup> S. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 17 ff. Kruger interprets oneiric literary works as 'middle-visions' aiming to negotiate reality and transcendence, pp. 129-30. It could be interesting to remember that in the Arabic world a third world was hypothesised: a 'mundus imaginis' intermediary between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, see H. Corbin, 'Le songe visionnaire en spiritualité islamique', in G. E. von Grunebaum and R. Caillois eds., *Le rêve et les sociétés humaines*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, pp. 380-406, p. 402.

<sup>20</sup> H. Phillips, 'Dream Poems', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500*, P. Brown ed., Blackwell Publishing, 2007, Blackwell Reference Online <<http://www.blackwellreference.com>> [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010], section 'Social and Political Dreams'. See also P. Brown, 'Borders', p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Spearing maintains that through LGW women live again, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 109. J. L. Kiser remarks that the poet as Morpheus raises the dead and that Chaucer resurrects Blanche through poetry, 'Sleep, Dreams and Poetry in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', in C. D. Benson, *Critical Essays on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde**, 1991, pp. 193-201, pp. 194-5, 199.

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Finally many studies have focussed on dreams as metaphor for imagination,<sup>22</sup> and the writing activity.<sup>23</sup> The book as *texte générateur* is a recurring topos in Chaucer who might have drawn it from Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*.<sup>24</sup> Although he draws upon the French poets, he frames all his poems in a dream.<sup>25</sup> *BD* and *PF* commence with the persona reading a book, in *HF* Geoffrey is reproached by the eagle for his reading and *LGW* is more explicitly about literary debate.<sup>26</sup> As Calin has stated, Machaut's greatest legacy to Chaucer is 'the notion of a poet writing poetry about the writing of poetry by a poet'.<sup>27</sup>

From this brief overview some reflections can be drawn. From broad scope studies aiming at outlining the understanding of the overarching system of thought,<sup>28</sup> the focus moved on to the dream as a single phenomenon. Those scholars who have traced the medieval system of beliefs, be they scientific, religious, or cultural in the wider sense, have underscored the importance of understanding the medieval 'model of the universe' that was harmonious and all encompassing: 'theology, science, history' organised in a 'hierarchical ladder'.<sup>29</sup> In contrast the recent trend has traced borders defining the single phenomenon to be investigated in order to achieve a deeper understanding.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps because 'drem' sounds like a linguistic false friend, or in the wake of Spearing's above-mentioned definition for dream-poetry, dreams

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<sup>22</sup> Calin, p. 288.

<sup>23</sup> Calin, p. 277; see H. Phillips, 'Dream Poems', section 'Narratological Themes'.

<sup>24</sup> Phillips, 'Dream Poems', section 'Books and the Dream'.

<sup>25</sup> Calin, pp. 189-90.

<sup>26</sup> Frank, pp. 25-6; Kolve refers to E. Salter's doctoral thesis where Alceste is paralleled to Art, V. A. Kolve, 'From Cleopatra to Alceste: An Iconographic Study of the *Legend of Good Women*', in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry*, J. P. Hermann and J. J. Burke eds., Tuscaloosa, Al., University of Alabama Press, 1981, pp. 130-178, p. 244, n.58; Calin, *The French Tradition*, p. 295; Phillips, 'Dream Poems'.

<sup>27</sup> Calin, p. 294.

<sup>28</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: an Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1964; W. C. Curry; F. X. Newman.

<sup>29</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, pp. 10-18.

<sup>30</sup> K. Lynch's analysis of the High medieval vision theorises the necessity of focussing on the 'subgenre' of philosophical visions. See pp. 4 ff; P. Brown focuses on 'the moment when the poet falls asleep', 'Borders', p. 25.

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and visions have been interpreted as 'dreamt by the "I" of the poem'.<sup>31</sup> Thus medieval literary 'dremes' have been mainly interpreted as phenomena occurring in sleep and they have been severed from similar oneiric phenomena.<sup>32</sup> Though this view magnifies the oneiric phenomenon in order to comprehend it more fully, it keeps it far-flung from the perspective of the whole system as foregrounded by Lewis, Curry and Newman. As a result of the process of specialisation neat distinctions have been drawn between disciplines that in the Middle Ages were not considered as such.<sup>33</sup> Boenig puts forward as evidence that the Vernon Manuscript could contain *Ancrene Riwle*, Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*, together with works that today are seen as 'literary' such as Langland's *Piers Plowman*.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Chaucer's 'The Parson's Tale' is included anonymously in the Longleat Manuscript 29 which also contains works by Hilton and Rolle.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 1, emphasis added. Understandably having to select amongst the profusion of production, Spearing decides for dreams 'dreamt'. Later Spearing admits that his selection excluded other poems that do not include an explicit dream. This would impact on identifying the dream poem as a 'distinct genre'. He notices that differences sought 'laboriously' by modern scholars to identify a genre might have been deemed 'trivial' by the medieval audience, 'Introduction' in *Reading Dreams*, ed. P. Brown, p. 5. The distinction wakefulness versus dream is generally accepted, with few exceptions: Piehler reflects that criticism has not taken into consideration the possibility that the poets were actually truthful when claiming to have had a visionary experience, *Visionary Landscape*, p. 83. Winny hypothesises that the narrator in *BD* is a dreamer before falling asleep, *Chaucer's Dream Poems*, p. 73. J. Davidoff also considers waking visions, *Beginning Well: Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry*, Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988, p. 89. C. B. Heatt identifies structural sequences usual in dream poems that are employed in poems without the dream framework. However, they are referred to as dreams because readers 'cannot help feeling that if this is not a dream, it ought to be'; 'Un autre fourme: Guillaume de Machaut and the Dream Vision Form', *The Chaucer Review*, 14 (1979) 97-115, p. 98.

<sup>32</sup> In his analytical overview, Kruger focuses specifically on 'dreaming'. P. Brown identifies 'boundary between waking and sleeping and focuses on 'the moment when the narrator falls asleep to enter a dream', 'Borders', p. 25. Also time boundaries are set clearly as P. Brown puts it in terms of entering and exiting the dream before writing poetry, even though this is an 'illusion', p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> R. Boenig argues that distinction between disciplines was not intended as today, *Chaucer and Mystics: The Canterbury Tales and the Genre of Devotional Prose*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1995, pp. 45-46. See also Davidoff for common sources of both secular literature and religious writing including sermons and preaching, *Beginning Well*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>34</sup> Boenig, *Chaucer and Mystics*, p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Boenig, *Chaucer and Mystics*, p. 12. T. H. Bestul remarks that *The Parson's Tale* is found in manuscripts with other religious writings, see 'Chaucer's Parson's Tale and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation', *Speculum*, 64 (1989) 600-619, p. 614, n. 49.

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What does 'dream' as in dream visions signify? At the beginning of last century the lexical wealth of Middle English expressing the dream experience drew the lexicographers' attention. Their aim was mainly to find a correspondence between Latin and Middle English terms. Ten Brink hypothesised the following correspondences: *visio: avisioun; phantasma: fantom; oraculum: revelacioun*, and oracle; *somnium: drem; insomnia: sweven*.<sup>36</sup> What possibilities might emerge if one were to consider 'drem' as conveying a wider significance beyond being a phenomenon occurring during sleep and to evaluate it in terms of transitional states of intense awareness leading to artistic creativity? The medieval audience was familiar with the oneiric imagery of transitional states. The poet's 'drem', far from being interpreted exclusively as a physiological episode, indicates to the audience the progress into the state of poetic composition, into the poetic narration, and how close to true knowledge, or to the apical experience, the poet is.<sup>37</sup> The 'drem' maps the process of abstraction taking place when the poet is entering the creative state, the shift from earthly world to the one of true knowledge that cannot be achieved in the ordinary consciousness nor without a guide pointing to the path (like the whelp), or lifting up the poet (like the eagle, or African). The new perspective acquired by the dreamer in the vision illustrates real life, and enables the final detachment from untrue earthly values. The transitional stage is signposted through the imagery of the oneiric vocabulary. Hence two main consequences derive. The transitional process can be initiated before the poet falls asleep. It is a mental process parallel to the physical and mental preparation of the mystics' (see p. 78) and triggered, in Piehler's words, by a

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Curry, p. 202. Curry however, does not agree with these associations. See also E. C. Ehrensperger, 'Dream Words in Old and Middle English', *PMLA* XLVI (1931) 80-89; B. Von Lindheim, 'OE. "Drēam" and its Subsequent Development', *The Review of English Studies*, 25, (1949), 193-209; and Robert J. Getty, 'Insomnia in Lexica', *The American Journal of Philology*, 54 (1933), pp. 1-28.

<sup>37</sup> On the relationship between poetry and creation through the Word, see J. Davidoff, *Beginning Well*, p. 35. On the difference between high and later medieval visions where through the former true knowledge is attained, see A. C. Spearing, 'Introduction', in *Reading Dreams*, p. 4. In the present work the focus of the analysis is not true knowledge attained in dreams, but rather how transitional states are expressed to the audience.

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‘preliminary ritual’ similar to both religious rite and *incubatio*.<sup>38</sup> Secondly the transition may or may not be signalled explicitly by the dream proper. It has been acknowledged that dream poetry is inscribed in the same tradition as Boethius’ *Consolatio* and Alain de Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae*, although these are not dreams proper,<sup>39</sup> and that poems with both explicit and implicit dreams share common elements. The attempt to comprehend ‘drem’ necessitates transcending the *littera*, by considering other possible levels of content.

### The Present Study

In the first part it was determined that dream was part of the system set out by philosophers ranking the states of consciousness leading towards ecstasy, by which true knowledge could be acquired, based on the evidence of biblical visionary experiences. According to the mystics their visionary experiences did not always occur whilst asleep.<sup>40</sup> The concept closest to that which can be experienced in ordinary consciousness is expressed by ‘dream’. From this perspective, to posit ‘drem’ as ‘dream’ in the modern sense has the consequence of narrowing the possible gamut of significance of the medieval term. Further it imposes boundaries, and dissects disciplines in a manner not consonant with the medieval mind.

The following part of the thesis is constituted of two intertwining threads. The first concerns ‘drem’ intended as a transitional state rich in allegorical connotations where the poet composes poetry. Thus the reading of dream visions moves beyond the

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<sup>38</sup> Piehler, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Spearing introduces them as ‘doctrinal visions’, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp.19 ff; S. Knight identifies Boethius’s *Consolatio* amongst the antecedents of dream visions, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p. 7; Lynch includes analysis of Boethius as a High Medieval dream vision. Despite the lack of the dream or vision, Lynch underlines the writer being in his bed, and the healing function of the vision, p. 55. See also C. B. Heatt, ‘Un autre fourme’.

<sup>40</sup> See Hildegard, and Margery, p. 116.



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level of the *littera*. The second relates to the mystical intertexts that could have had an impact on Chaucer's works. It explores how the model of the mystical transition between states of consciousness has influenced Chaucer's dream visions. These two threads illustrate the relation between dream visions and poetry writing. Further this reading of dream visions can illustrate the narrative structure of Chaucer's works (not only of the oneiric poems), as it opens the way to the possibility that works with no explicit dream could still present some elements of the dream visions.

Visions and dreams employed extensively by Chaucer have not been paralleled by commentators to the Middle English mystics' experience.<sup>41</sup> If one wishes to comprehend the medieval vision of the world, it is still fundamental – to borrow Curry's words – 'to reconstruct the whole system'. R. Boenig identifies 'a cultural and social intertext' constituted by devotional writings composed by the Middle English mystics and by anonymous spiritual writers by which Chaucer could have been influenced, even though unintentionally.<sup>42</sup> Their texts 'share not only attitudes about language with Chaucer but also specific *topoi*, themes, imagery, and occasionally, characters'.<sup>43</sup> This part applies the cultural intertext of mystics' attitude in analysing Chaucer's works from a twofold perspective. First, as the transition between states of consciousness towards ecstasy pertains mainly to the domain of mysticism, it aims to show how the literary 'drem' signals the passage from ordinary awareness into a more acute state in which the creative poetic creation occurs. 'Drem' encompasses the

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<sup>41</sup> So far the present writer has only found that M. Carruthers parallels the entering the chamber and the act of meditating, *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 174. Carruthers' study explores works written until the thirteenth century. Correspondences between sleep and meditation can be found in the studies by Huppé and Robertson, and Koonce. However, the transitional states of awareness common to both poets and mystics, and the process of entering the dream state as metaphor of an intense state of awareness metaphor of the poetic composition in relation to dream poetry seem to be missing.

<sup>42</sup> Boenig, *Chaucer and Mystics*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>43</sup> Boenig, *Chaucer and Mystics*, p. 11. Boenig's study focuses on the influence of the pseudo-Dionysus upon the *CT* and the relative scepticism on language.

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many intermediate transitional states. Secondly it explores how the 'scale of perfection' of the mystics' writing applies also to Chaucer's secular works. Within this context and in accord with the medieval mental universe characterised by the 'ladder'<sup>44</sup> the different stages from ordinary awareness to the more intense consciousness are signalled by means of symbols and imagery shared by mystics and poets. Although Chaucer was not a mystic, he deploys imageries and knowledge that pertain to mystical discourse.

Considering only dreams dreamt could lead to oversight of the overall narrative structure of poems. Imageries signalling a transitional state risk being neglected if the dream frame is missing. In this instance *BD* would be analysed whereas Pandarus awakening at the swallow's singing, and Troilus composing in the garden would be dismissed because of lack of dream proper (on Troilus composing in the garden, see p. 69). It can be argued that the 'drem' narrative structure impacts not only on Chaucer's dream visions but on his following works, even though the 'dreeming' *T* does not literally fall asleep and dream. In later Chaucerian works oneiric imagery is still present, elaborated in a more subtle fashion. It will also be argued that not only the 'dreeming' *T* undergoes passages of states, but characters within poems may experience similar transitional states eddying into poetic composition. In Chaucer's literary career *TC* marks a fundamental moment, as it is rich both in symbols shared with the mystics, and it signals the decisive turn towards employment of a multi-levelled narrative structure that is applied in *LGW* and amplified in *CT* (see below, p. 285).

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<sup>44</sup> Lewis, *Discarded Image*, p. 12.

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### The Ladder-Like Structure

The image of the ladder does not only pertain to the mystics' discourse. It is sewn onto Lady Philosophy's dress and symbolises the passage from practice to theory.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, for the medieval mentality systemising the various aspects of the world harmoniously and hierarchically, the ladder represents the symbolic connection between earthly and spiritual worlds in mysticism, practice and theory in philosophical sense.<sup>46</sup> Within the transitional process there are intermediate stages that medieval poets and spiritual writers identify. Theologians classify *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, *contemplatio* as their path to true knowledge (see p. 43). Richard Rolle and the *Cloud*-author incite their novices to reading, thinking, and praying (see p. 83). The sequence of mental actions in the following lines could be paralleled to the one invoked by the mystics:

“Car sur Regnart poeult on gloser,  
Penser, estudier, muser”  
[Car sur Renart, on peut gloser,  
penser, étudier, rêver]<sup>47</sup>

The sequence glossing, thinking, studying, and ‘musing’ (or ‘dreaming’ paralleling the modern French rendition), clearly resembles the process from concentration through reading and meditating to the consciousness of a higher state.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Boece, Pr. 1, ll. 28-37, p. 398, *De consolacione*, pr. 1, p. 70. Piehler emphasises that Greek θεωρία was linked to art and poetry and that according to Aristotle it is a state of contemplation of God; ‘Medieval visionary poetry [...] might be regarded as a means of attainment of *theoria*.’ p. 39, it is associated etymologically to ‘vision’, speculation, and contemplation. See OED, ‘theory’. The meaning of ‘contemplation’ appears starting from Plato, Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots*, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1968-1980, ‘θεωρός’, p. 433.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis, *Discarded Image*, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> [As on Renart one can gloss | Think, study, dream] *Renart le contrefait*, ll. 105-6, Gaston Raynaud, Henri Lemaître eds., Paris, Champion, 1914, vol. 2, quoted in J. Cerquiglini-Toulet, ‘Penser la littérature médiévale: par-delà le binarisme’, *French Studies*, 64, (2010) 1-12, p. 10. Cerquiglini quotes these lines remarking that they mark a ‘conversation entre les textes’ and the development of literature.

<sup>48</sup> The Middle English meanings of the verb ‘muse’ include: 1a) to meditate, to ponder; 2) to marvel, to be amazed; 4) daydream, to dream, see MED, ‘muse’. ‘To muse’ is still related to meditation, see OED, ‘muse’, v.

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This part explores how the mystics' ascent to ecstasy parallels the poets' path to creativity. By considering 'drem' as the wider term representing the transitional states it becomes evident that the ladder-like structure underlies different literary works. As the Boethian ladder spanned practice and theory, so the visionary experience is made up of intermediate rungs enabling the gradual transition between states of awareness. In the following sections images related to dream and sleep employed as standing for transitional states of consciousness are tracked back. The significance of the image of the poet's bedchamber will then be explored together with the relevance of the debate concerning truth and falsehood in poetry. Then the final section investigates how Chaucer employs these images, and how they are connected both with the narrative structure and the writing process. It will be seen how the mystics' model of ascent epitomised by the ladder is present in Chaucer's works, and how images conveying similar significance both in dream visions and in mystical writings signpost relevant stages within the poet's ascent into composition, and/or the character's progress towards apical experience.

### **Dreams Interpretation**

Chauntecleer and Pertelote's debate on dream interpretation has not achieved completion and probably never will. Similarly Chaucer's dream visions have mainly been defined according to the type of dream. The unambiguous dream framework Chaucer establishes leaves little doubt that his are not physiological dreams. Therefore dream visions have been mainly object of studies separate from the so-called main production; and they have been interpreted according to medieval dream-lore, or according to psychoanalytic theories. Most of the critical attempt has been made to interpret Chaucer's literary dreams, following Macrobius's and Curry's

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classifications. Criticism agrees that the early poems are instances of *somnium animale*, except for *HF* – that is a *somnium coeleste*.<sup>49</sup> However, the complexity of Chaucer's dream visions is confirmed by the combined possible interpretations acknowledged by Spearing: depending on the aspects considered *BD* can be a *somnium coeleste*,<sup>50</sup> *HF* a *somnium animale*, and a mock-oraculum,<sup>51</sup> or encompassing the three categories of *somnium coeleste*, *animale* and *oraculum*<sup>52</sup> – and *LGW* can also be a *somnium coeleste* and a revelation.<sup>53</sup> On application of Macrobius's classification they fall into the category of *insomnium* as they are triggered by day's concerns, except for *PF*, which is an *oraculum* due to the apparition of African.<sup>54</sup> What has been overlooked is the state in which the poet enters a trance and composes. This would not have escaped the medieval audience.

The Middle English linguistic wealth of the oneiric semantic field reflects an acute sensitivity regarding the slightest variation in consciousness and a network of transitional states is apparent. The inheritance of medieval dreams from the Bible and from Boethius's *Consolatio* has been widely acknowledged.<sup>55</sup> Boethius is in a stupefied state and casts his eyes down when Lady Philosophy appears.<sup>56</sup> Similarly when Alain de Lille is in front of Nature he is 'wounded by stupefaction', he leaves his mind 'buried entirely in ecstasy neither alive nor dead'.<sup>57</sup> In *Anticlaudianus* after

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<sup>49</sup> Curry, p. 234 ff; Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 57, 76, 92, 107.

<sup>50</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, respectively pp. 78, 82.

<sup>52</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>54</sup> J. S. Russell considers all Chaucer's dream visions as *insomnia*, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> Knight, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 7; H. Phillips ed., *Chaucer, The Book of the Duchess*, Durham medieval texts; 3, 3rd revised ed., New Elvet, Durham, Dept. of English Language and Medieval Literature, University of Durham, 1997, p. 42; Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 18 ff.

<sup>56</sup> '[O]bstupui visuque in terram defixo', *De consolatione*, 1, pr. 1, p. 74; 'I wax al abayssched and astoned, and caste my syghte down to erthe', *Boece*, Book I, pr.1, ll. 80-1, p. 398.

<sup>57</sup> '[M]entem, stupore vulneratus, exui, totusque in exstasis alienatione sepultus, nec vivus, nec mortuus inter utrumque laborabam' *De Planctu Naturae*, PL 210, col. 412 <[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1128-1202,\\_Alanus\\_de\\_Insulis,\\_Liber\\_de\\_Planctu\\_Naturae](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1128-1202,_Alanus_de_Insulis,_Liber_de_Planctu_Naturae),>

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stupefying (l. 3),<sup>58</sup> Phronesis falls into a state of soporific ecstasy (ll. 7-8; 78).<sup>59</sup> Afflicted from lethargy (l. 87),<sup>60</sup> the state in which Phronesis lies is not 'the drowsiness of ordinary sleep, but an image of death which darkens light and deadens the vital element to a greater extent than ordinary sleep but less than death.'<sup>61</sup>

In the 'selva oscura' Dante was overwhelmed by sleep (*Inf.*, I, 11). In *Vita nuova* after Beatrice greets him, as if he is inebriated (III, 2), Dante finds shelter in his room where he is won over by sleep during which he has a vision of the god of Love (III, 3). In Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione* (1342-3), although the poet's mind is as if lost, ('smarrita', I, l. 7), Love kindles fervent ardour and his fantasy goes out of itself (I, ll. 10-11). Sleep wins over the poet who falls asleep (I, l. 20). Petrarch's experience parallels Boethius's vision. The poet is astonished, 'attonito', and in meditation, 'cogitanti', when he is won over by sleep and Lady Truth and Augustine appear; and then the light stupefies him, 'stupentem'.<sup>62</sup>

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LT.pdf> [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2009]; *The Plaint of Nature*, trans. J. J. Sheridan, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980, p. 116.

<sup>58</sup> '[M]entemque stupore | Percussit' [benumbed her mind], *Anticlaudianus*, VI, l. 3, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/alanus/alanus2.html>> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010] *Anticlaudianus or the Good and Perfect Man*, trans. James J. Sheridan, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973, p. 156.

<sup>59</sup> 'Oppressit Fronesis animum, sompnoque soporans | Extasis ipsa suo, mentem dormire coegit' [Thus drowsiness overcame the alert mind of Phronesis and false sleep weighed it down], *Anticlaudianus*, VI, ll. 7-8, Sheridan, p. 156 <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/alanus/alanus2.html>> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010]. 'Agnouit, uidit stupidam stupuitque iacentem' [recognised Phronesis from the clear indication of the signs, she saw her in a maze and was amazed at the patient], *Anticlaudianus*, VI, l. 78, Sheridan, p. 158.

<sup>60</sup> 'Inuenit et Fronesim letargi sompnia' [Finally she tracks it down and discovers that Phronesis is suffering the derangement of lethargy] *Anticlaudianus*, VI, l. 87, *Anticlaudianus*, Sheridan, p. 159, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/alanus/alanus2.html>> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010].

<sup>61</sup> 'Expugnare parat, sed talis sompnus obaudit. | Nec mirum si morbus ad hec contempnit abire. | Non erat iste sopor somni, sed mortis ymago, | Que uite tenebrat lucem uitamque soporat | Plus sompno, sed morte minus, maiorque sopore, | Morte minor, sed fida tamen prefatio mortis' [The disease contemptuously refuses to leave when confronted with these remedies. This was not the drowsiness of ordinary sleep, but an image of death which darkens life's light and deadens the vital element to a greater extent than ordinary sleep but less than death], *Anticlaudianus*, VI, ll. 94-99, Sheridan, p. 159 <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/alanus/alanus2.html>> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010].

<sup>62</sup> F. Petrarch, *Secretum*, in *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti, Milano, Riccardo Ricciardi editore, 1955, p. 22.

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There are also abundant references to transitional states in the works of the French poets. The narrator in Machaut's *Dit dou Vergier* suffers from love sickness, then swoons and has a vision of the god of love. The noise of the bush shaken by the god flying away interrupts the dreamer's 'transissement'.<sup>63</sup> In *Le dit de la fontaine amoureuse* the poet is in *dortveille*.<sup>64</sup> Before being visited by the three Ladies, Christine de Pizan immersed in deep thoughts is in 'letargie'.<sup>65</sup> Given the significant oneiric production, the list could easily become quite extensive.<sup>66</sup> What is 'stupor'? Dante defines it as 'a bewilderment of the soul due to seeing, hearing, or in some way feeling great and marvellous matters. As they appear great, they make those who sense them revere, in that they appear marvellous, they render them willing to know them'.<sup>67</sup>

Stupor, lethargy, trance, swoons, and dreams all share a shift of the conscious mind as transitional state. In front of these terms signposting a 'grammaire d'ouverture',<sup>68</sup> one can sense that there is something that contemporary readers might miss when reading medieval literature.<sup>69</sup> Some medieval imagery that had symbolic value and that could be understood by a medieval audience needs to be translated. The symbolic significance of sleep was explained by Alanus (see p. 161). In an extremely nuanced article J. Cerquiglini explicates that the morning motif

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<sup>63</sup> 'Et mist hors dou transissement | Ou j'avoie esté longuement' (ll.1209-10), quoted in Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> '[en] un lit ou pas ne dormoie [...] [c]om cils qui dort et encor veille' (ll. 62-64) ['in bed somewhere but not sleeping [...] like somebody who is asleep yet still awake'], G. de Machaut, *Le livre de la Fontaine amoureuse*, J. Cerquiglini-Toulet ed. and trans., Paris Stock, 1993; B. A. Windeatt, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1982, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Christine de Pizan, *La cité des dames*, E. J. Richards ed., Roma, Carocci, 2008, p. 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Stupor, letargie, swoon, transissement*: all these states would be worth a separate study.

<sup>67</sup> 'Stupore è uno stordimento d'animo per grandi e maravigliose cose vedere o udire o per alcuno modo sentire: che in quanto paiono grandi, fanno reverente a sé quelli che le sente; in quanto paiono mirabili, fanno voglioso di sapere di quelle', D. Alighieri, *Convivio*, 4, 25, <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2009].

<sup>68</sup> The expression is borrowed from Cerquiglini who refers it to the *topos* of morning, J. Cerquiglini, 'La matin mélancolique', *Relecture d'un topos d'ouverture aux XIV et XV siècles*, *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 45 (1993) 7-22, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Davidoff, pp. 13 ff.

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expressed an 'état d'esprit' before becoming a literally temporal description.<sup>70</sup> Similarly it can be argued that the oneiric imagery points to an *état de conscience*, a state of awareness. The *topos* of the garden can be recalled here. A crucial moment in Augustine's progress towards conversion, when he states that he was in his 'innermost self' and could see the 'light', is represented figuratively by a recumbent figure lying under a tree in a garden.<sup>71</sup> Such images needed no explanation to the medieval audience, as they were common cultural heritage.<sup>72</sup> It is a figurative language employed in churches through painting and sculpture, so too in poetry.<sup>73</sup>

These images are meant to communicate and to impact upon the audience, as Christ's passion provoked mystics' emotional reactions.<sup>74</sup> Similarly images could signpost the journey of the poetic mind towards the transitional state of creation. These images date back to the Patristic tradition and are still employed by Chaucer and later authors. As already mentioned, a number of visions are not introduced by a dream, although they include elements typical of the genre. Chaucer sets his earlier poems in the oneiric framework and adds a touch of realism by depicting his bedchamber, and by following the psychology of dream. The realistic effect and the psychological laws of dreams have drawn much of the attention of recent criticism. This has underscored mainly the material aspects of his works, dismissing the possible symbolic aspects – probably in part as a reaction to the Robertsonian reading of medieval texts. Without following the Robertsonian hexegesy it is crucial

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<sup>70</sup> Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Le Matin mélancolique', p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> C. Dahlberg, *The Literature of Unlikeness*, Hanover, University Press of New England, 1988, p. 2. The episode is in *Confessionum libri tredecim*, 7, 10, 16. The image illustrating the scene is in the frontispiece of MS. f. Med. 77 (leaf 10v), Boston Public Library, in Dahlberg, page facing the title.

<sup>72</sup> A. Minnis, 'Medieval Imagination and Memory', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005 vol. 2, pp. 239-274, p. 239.

<sup>73</sup> For a parallel between painting and speech, see V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative. The First Five Canterbury Tales*, London, Arnold, 1984, p. 25.

<sup>74</sup> A. Minnis, 'Medieval Imagination and Memory', pp. 260 ff.



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to evaluate the symbolic aspects that may be conveyed by figurative imagery in Chaucer's works.

As the morning motif can be read as a state of awareness, the garden as a space of *alienatio*, similarly the oneiric imagery in Chaucer's works can convey the significance of the poet's entering the transitional state of creation. In order to understand the oneiric imagery it would be well to go beyond the concreteness of the dream framework. It was warned in the Middle Ages to beware the power of images where literal meaning could prevail over the symbolic.<sup>75</sup> This has not been heeded in some recent criticism. However, the extent of the debate witnesses that these images still conserve their communicative power.

### ***3.1. Poetry and Dreams***

Poetry and dreams deal with two aspects: the relationship between truth and falsehood; and their connection with theology. Both poetry and dreams are strictly interrelated with the search for truth and offer several levels of meaning ranging from the superficial – immediately evident – to the deeper ones, hidden in the texture of narration. Indeed analysis of dreams implies discerning true dreams from false ones. Similarly, analysis of poetry requires understanding of its deeper significance. Reflecting upon poetry and dreams and their elements of truth involves the act of interpretation. The debate on the relationship between poetry and truth, and their role as poets was quite lively among medieval poets, as will be seen shortly.

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<sup>75</sup> Minnis, 'Medieval Imagination and Memory', p. 256.

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So far the oneiric phenomenon in dream poetry has been analysed *per se* or together with visions, given that the visual element is predominant in this genre – indeed it has also been defined as dream-vision. Dreams have been explored separately from phenomena such as meditation, ecstasy, and prophecy, amongst others identified in Chapter 1. The present reading wishes to hypothesise that dreams, together with similar phenomena, were considered in the Middle Ages as belonging to a particular area of consciousness, which from the ordinary state leads upwards up to rapture. This consciousness, shared by mystics and poets, is ‘authoritatively’ acknowledged by philosophers including Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas in their stages up to true knowledge, as seen in Chapter 1.

#### Truth and the ‘beautiful lie’

In the medieval period poets were considered on a different plane from philosophers and mystics. The latter – in their somewhat different way – tended to the true knowledge, whereas poets were considered storytellers, makers of fiction.<sup>76</sup> Medieval poets were aware of how poetry and poets were regarded and confronted the charges against them extensively. Therefore it is worth recalling the main ideas as they were voiced by the poets themselves. Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch deal with the connection between poetry and truth explicitly; Chaucer’s *House of Fame* shows the poet’s awareness of the issue.<sup>77</sup>

The relationship between poetry and truth entails issues of interpreting the different levels of the text, which can be paralleled to biblical exegesis. The tradition was

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<sup>76</sup> For a more exhaustive debate on the relationship between poetry and theology, see E. R. Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 2006, ch. 12, where the origin of the debate between Albertino Mussato and Giovannino from Mantua is also covered.

<sup>77</sup> *Chaucer’s Dream Poetry*, N. Haveley, H. Phillips eds., London, Longman, 1997, p. 115. Haveley remarks that it is not possible to state whether Chaucer shared Boccaccio’s opinion on poetry.

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established by Augustine who expressed the need to distinguish between the husk and the kernel.<sup>78</sup> As the biblical text could be interpreted at four levels, similarly the literary text could be construed and interpreted on several levels.<sup>79</sup> One did not need to be a theologian or a professional poet to be aware of this practice. Fundamental Christian teaching was passed on to everyone during Masses and liturgies.<sup>80</sup> Margery Kempe demonstrates she knows the literal as well as the symbolic meaning of the sentence '*Crescite et multiplicamini*' when questioned by a cleric (ch. 51).

Dante confronts the matter of true and falsehood and of the four levels of interpretation in his *Convivio*; Boccaccio's commentary on Dante's *Comedy* distinguishes between literal and allegorical meaning of the text; and Petrarch often hints at the different levels of interpretations. In his *Convivio* Dante illustrates that texts can be understood and must be expounded according to four manners: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.<sup>81</sup> The literal sense does not go beyond the letters of the words; the allegorical is what 'is hidden under the cloak of these fables; it is a truth hidden underneath a beautiful lie'<sup>82</sup> that is to be found by wise people; the moral sense is what the readers should look for for their advantage and of their learners<sup>83</sup>; finally the anagogical sense is what the texts refer to above the most obvious meaning, in that it points at its super-terrestrial significance.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *De doctrina Christiana*, 3.7.11. See B. F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson Jr., *Fryt and Chaf, Studies in Chaucer's Allegories*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 5 ff.

<sup>79</sup> See for instance Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 18; M. Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith*, London, New York, Longman, 1993; Mâle, *The Gothic Image. Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, tr. D. Nussey, London, Collins, 1961, pp. 31-2. For a brief overview of the tradition of biblical exegesis before and Augustine, see Mâle, *ibid.*, pp. 133-39.

<sup>80</sup> Mâle, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> D. Alighieri, *Convivio*, II, I, 1-6, 'le scritture si possono intendere e deonsi esponere massimamente per quattro sensi' [Writings can be understood and must be expounded mainly in four senses].

<sup>82</sup> 'L'altro si chiama allegorico, e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto 'l manto di queste favole, ed è una veritate ascosa sotto bella menzogna [...] fosse trovato per li savi', *Convivio*, II, I.

<sup>83</sup> '[E] quello che li lettori deono intentamente andare apostando per le scritture ad utilitate di loro e di loro discenti', *Convivio*, II, I.

<sup>84</sup> 'Lo quarto senso si chiama anagogico, cioè sovrasenso; e questo è quando spiritualmente si spone una scrittura, la quale ancora che sia vera eziandio nel senso litterale, per le cose significate significa

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This approach to texts is shared by Boccaccio in his *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*. Here Boccaccio refers to the four senses and explicitly parallels poetry and sacred texts, in that their truth is hidden beneath fables. Dante as a poet, hid the religious truth under the vulgar bark of his poem.<sup>85</sup> Boccaccio continues specifying that all the senses other than the literal – also defined as ‘historial’ – can be referred to as allegorical.<sup>86</sup> Boccaccio’s purpose in his *Esposizioni* is to uncover what is hidden under the ‘crust of the letter’.<sup>87</sup> Later he returns to this concept when explaining the sense of Dante’s lines ‘Mirate alla dottrina che s’asconde sotto ’l velame delli versi strani’ (*Inf.* IX, ll. 62-3.), ‘[l]ook at the doctrine that is hidden beneath the veil of the unfamiliar lines’. With these words Dante addresses those who do not perceive that there may be something beneath the literal sense, since they understand but the literal sense.<sup>88</sup>

Boccaccio is aware that poets are associated with lies. Indeed when relating the etymology of ‘poet’ from the verb ‘poio, pois’, he does not fail to stress that ‘fingo’, ‘to feign’, has three meanings: ‘to compose’; ‘to ornament’; and ‘to lie’.<sup>89</sup> Notwithstanding that one of the meanings is ‘to lie’, Boccaccio reiterates his defence

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delle superne cose dell’eternal gloria’ [The fourth sense is called anagogic, that is to say above the significance; and this is when some writing is expressed spiritually. Although it is true literally, through the matter that is meant it signifies some superior matter of the eternal glory], *Convivio*, II, I.

<sup>85</sup> ‘[N]asconditore [...] di così cara gioia, come e’ la catolica verità’, sotto la volgare corteccia del suo poema’, G. Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, ed. G. Padoan, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca, Milano, Mondadori, 1964, Vol. 6, p. 57.

<sup>86</sup> Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 58.

<sup>87</sup> ‘[A]prendo quello che sotto la crosta della lettera sta nascoso’ [by opening what is hidden beneath the crust of the letter], Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 59.

<sup>88</sup> ‘E fanno queste parole dirittamente contro ad alcuni, li quali, non intendendo le cose nascose sotto il velame di questi versi, non vogliono che l’autore abbia alcuna altra cosa intesa se non quello che semplicemente suona il senso litterale; li quali per queste parole possono manifestamente comprendere l’autore avere inteso altro che quello che per la corteccia si comprende’ [These words are addressed straight against some who, do not perceive the hidden matter beneath the veil of these lines, therefore they do not want the author to mean anything but what is understood through the bark], Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 480.

<sup>89</sup> ‘[C]omporre’; ‘ornare’; and ‘mentire’, Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 34. This argument can be found also in *Genealogia deorum*, XIV, 7; 8; 10; 18; 19.

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of poetry as it does not consists of lies and poets are not liars.<sup>90</sup> Petrarch agrees that poetry contains a hidden sense. In his *Secretum*, a dialogue between himself and Augustine, when the poet relates how he interprets the meaning of the goddess Venus in a passage from *Aeneid*, Augustine confirms that beneath the cloud the poet has found some light. Indeed the truth of the poetic fiction must be found through a very thin crack.<sup>91</sup>

### Poetry and Theology

The idea of the light to be found beneath the screen of clouds leads one to consider the obscurity veiling poetry and also to the relationship between poetry and theology. It is again Augustine to whom Petrarch refers when he vehemently defends the role of poets and explains the function of obscurity in poetry. According to Augustine the multiplicity of interpretations is positive: obscurity produces many interpretations, and men draw more richness from it.<sup>92</sup> Soon after these considerations on obscurity

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<sup>90</sup> See for instance *Esposizioni*, pp. 34 ff., *Genealogia*, XIV, ch.7, 13. As Carruthers notices it is quite difficult to translate the ancient concept of 'ornament' into modern English, in that 'we insist on conceptually separating decoration from function', see M. Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 205. In Middle English in addition to 'ornamental apparel' (1.a), within the religious field, 'ornament' also conveyed the close relation between elements. Thus birds were 'an ornament of the heavens'; similarly the hand was of the body (1.b), see *MED*, 'ournement'. Later from 1530 the meaning shifts even more towards aesthetic concept, see *OED*, 'ornament' 2.b. According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, it would be a mistake to explain 'the forms of primitive and popular art as products only of a "decorative" instinct', 'Symplegades', in Montagu, M.F. Ashley, ed., *Studies and Essays in the History of Science and Learning Offered in Homage to George Sarton on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday, 31 August 1944*, New York, Henry Schuman, 1947, pp. 463-88, p. 482. For the idea that the function of medieval art was not merely aesthetic, see Mâle, whose *Gothic Image* is based on the concept that medieval art was didactic and strictly related to theological literature, see Preface and in particular p. viii.

<sup>91</sup> August.: 'Preclare lucem sub nubibus invenisti. Sic nempe poeticis inest veritas figmentis, tenuissimis rimulis adeunda' [Augustine: You have drawn clear light from beneath the clouds. Without any doubts beneath poetic fictions there is a truth that must be perceived through very thin cracks], Petrarch, *Secretum*, p. 104.

<sup>92</sup> "Ideo enim" inquit "forte obscurius positum est, ut multos intellectus generet et ditiores discedant homines, qui clausum invenerunt quod multis modis aperiretur, quam si uno modo apertum invenirent" ["It was probably expressed so obscurely, so that it can produce many interpretations, and so that the men - who found close what could be open in a number of manners - could enjoy a wider richness than they would have if they had found it open in only one manner"], Petrarch, *Invective contra medicum*, III, in *Prose*, p. 672. This passage inspired by Augustine is also referred to by Boccaccio in *Genealogia*, XIV, Osgood C. G. ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1930, p. 60. The original passage from Augustine is in *De civitate Dei*, 11.19: 'Quamvis itaque divini sermonis obscuritas etiam ad hoc sit utilis, quod plures sententias veritatis parit et in lucem notitiae producit, dum alius eum sic,

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Petrarch moves on to declare the relationship between poets and theologians. In the ancient past, he maintains, theologians were poets too, as saints have confirmed, and the term itself indicates.<sup>93</sup>

Boccaccio reflects on the term 'poet' too. Drawing upon Petrarch,<sup>94</sup> he reiterates the common origin of theologians and poets. Ancient priests composed their prayers by using words different from the ordinary ones employed by common people. In order to employ an unusual language for communication with the divinity, they composed in poetry and hid the mystery of divinity beneath the 'veil of fables', so that they would not become of 'little value'.<sup>95</sup> Boccaccio moves on within the religious field by comparing the style of poets-theologians to that of prophets, in that their 'veiled' words also express the divine power.<sup>96</sup>

### Interpretation

The process of the exegesis of the text leads to a consideration of the reader and of the poet. Different groups of readers access the same text at different levels of

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alius sic intellegit' [The obscurity of the divine word is useful because it originates a number of interpretations of truth, and it leads to the light of reflection, when one interprets according a sense and another according a different one] <<http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm>> [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010].

<sup>93</sup> 'Primo nempe theologos apud gentes fuisse poetas et philosophorum maximi testantur, et sanctorum confirmat autoritas et ipsum, si nescis, poete nomen indicat' [The greatest philosophers maintain that within the peoples the poets were the first theologians; and the authority of the saints confirms it; and if you do not know, the term itself of poet indicates it], Petrarch, *Invective contra medicum*, p. 674. In Petrarch's opinion true poets are not those who compose lines empty of content, but rather those who have mind, divine inspiration, and the skill to sing great matter, see F. Petrarch, *De vita solitaria*, in *Prose*, op. cit., pp. 524-27. Moreover, Petrarch maintains that unlike other arts where mediocrity is allowed, in poetry mediocre poets are not allowed by men, nor by gods, Petrarch, *Invective contra medicum*, in *Prose*, p. 667. Also Boccaccio draws a clear distinction between poets and comic poets, *Genealogia*, Osgood ed., XIV, ch. 20, p. 95.

<sup>94</sup> Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, pp. 34 ff. He refers to Petrarch's *Familiars*, X, 4, see Padoan's comment in Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, vol. 6, p. 781, n. 71; Boccaccio also draws upon *Genealogia*, XIV, chs. 7, 8, 18, 19, see *ibid.*, p. 780, n. 67. The incorrect etymology provided by Boccaccio (employed in *Vita Dantis* and in *Genealogia*) according to which the Greek term 'poetês' corresponds to Latin 'esquisito parlare' ('il qual vocabolo suona in latino "esquisito parlare"' [exquisite speaking]) derives from Petrarch's above-mentioned letter and was due to an incorrect interpretation of Isidore's code owned by Petrarch himself, see *Esposizioni*, p. 781, n. 75.

<sup>95</sup> '[F]abuloso velame'; 'di poco pregio', Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 35. Boccaccio reiterates this concept in *Genealogia*, XIV, 12, Osgood, pp. 59 ff.

<sup>96</sup> Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 35.

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meaning. Readers are distinguished in two large categories: those who can practise the allegorical sense, the 'wise ones', 'savi',<sup>97</sup> and those who can feed themselves only with the sweetness of the text, 'i semplici'.<sup>98</sup> Boccaccio and Petrarch agree that illiterate people enjoy the literal level of the story, whereas the literate search for the deeper significance of the text.<sup>99</sup> On the author's side one could argue that by deliberately choosing to compose a text requiring interpretation, medieval poets pose themselves as creators.<sup>100</sup> In their creation they intermingle historical meaning with allegorical, truth with falsehood – Dante's 'bella menzogna'. From his point of view, only a few people can have a complete understanding. Certainly poets can, as may be inferred from what Dante states in *Vita nuova*. After having his vision, he composed a poem that he sent to other poets and asked them for their opinion.<sup>101</sup> Full understanding can be achieved also by those who are willing to appreciate poetry by hard work.<sup>102</sup> This attitude towards the text recalls the theologians' and the mystics' effort to interpret the Holy Writ and to achieve truth. As Mâle puts it, 'the wise pass from the visible to the invisible, and in reading nature read the thoughts of God.'

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<sup>97</sup> *Convivio*, II, I, 1-6.

<sup>98</sup> 'E in questa maniera intorno al senso allegorico si possono i savi essercitare e intorno alla dolcezza testuale nudrire i semplici, cioè quegli li quali ancora tanto non sentono che essi possano al senso allegorico trapassare' [In this manner the wise ones can practise the allegorical sense and the simple ones can feed from the sweetness of the text, that is to say those who do not feel they can move on to the allegorical sense], Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 58.

<sup>99</sup> See Petrarch, *Invective contra medicum*, I, where the poet holds that only the literate ones see the lie in the poetic 'fictio' <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/xtf/view?docId=bibit001694/bibit001694.xml&chunk.id=d7228e127&toc.depth=1&toc.id=&brand=default>>, see also F. Petrarch, *Triumphs*, ed. M. Ariani, Milano, Mursia, 1988, p. 25, where Ariani quotes a passage from *Sen.*, XII in which Petrarch reiterates his view on poetry.

<sup>100</sup> See Osgood, *On Poetry*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>101</sup> '[P]regandoli che giudicassero la mia visione, scrissi a lloro ciò che io avea nel mio sonno veduto. E cominciai allora questo sonetto' [I prayed to them so that they would judge my vision, and I wrote to them what I had seen in my sleep. And then I commenced this sonnet], D. Alighieri, *La vita nuova*, 1, [www.bibliotecaitaliana.it](http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it), [accessed January 2010]. In order to have his vision judged, Dante composes the poem that will send to the famous poets of his time.

<sup>102</sup> Osgood, *On Poetry*, XIV, 12, p. 62, 'You must read, you must persevere, you must sit up nights, you must inquire, and exert to the utmost every power of your mind. If one way does not lead to the desired meaning, take another; if obstacles arise, still another, until, if your strength holds out, you will find that clear which at first looked dark.' The reader, today as yesterday, has still to discern the truth from the lie, kernel from husk, or the 'fruyt' from 'chaf' (*NPT*, l. 3443). The relevance of the reader's task in front of the text has been pointed out by Boccaccio who holds that 'when things perfectly clear seem obscure, it is the beholder's fault', Osgood, *On Poetry*, p. 59. Boccaccio's opinion upon the reader's role is also pointed out in Huppé and Robertson, p. 20.

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True knowledge, then, consists not in the study of things in themselves – the outwards form – but in penetrating to the inner meaning intended by God for our instructions.<sup>103</sup>

Why do poets, positing themselves as creators, interpose a veil between the readers and the ultimate truth hidden in the text? How does the poet justify his interposing of ‘bark’ between the reader and the ‘kernel’? There are several reasons why poets veil the poetic truth: to avoid truth becoming cheap and vulgar; to make it more valuable; and ‘to challenge the reader to utmost effort’.<sup>104</sup> As to the last observation one could argue that even though the poet does acknowledge the reader’s task, it could not be a matter of ‘challenge’ from the author’s part. Rather, what the poet requires the reader to do appears to be a task similar to the one performed by the mystics as they ascend the ladder approaching ever closer the veil interposed between them and the ultimate vision of the divinity. Even though mystics have withdrawn from the active life of the city they too are encouraged to read and even more to meditate on the Holy texts until some light is shown. Reading is not a simple passive task; in fact it necessitates deep meditation (see Ch. 2, p. 83).

Interpretation is therefore a nodal point where poets, mystics, and theologians meet. The veil is a common image employed by both poets and mystics not by chance. *Integumentum* is what envelops Macrobius’s *somnium* and hides its significance (see Ch.

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<sup>103</sup> Mâle, p. 29.

<sup>104</sup> Osgood, *On Poetry*, p. 170, n. 10. Boccaccio explains that it is common that the most precious things are kept locked and only rarely shown so that they do not lose their value because of over exposure. Secondly what is achieved through effort is more pleasurable. Indeed those who have found some truth forget the difficulty and remember the truth enjoyably. Finally those who are born with the poetic inclination for divine will, follow the divine will as this is how poetry is. See Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, pp. 54 ff. In this passage Boccaccio also refers to Macrobius who explains that poets hide the dearest things so that they do not become vulgar. *Somnium*, I, ii, 17-18. Boccaccio returns on the matter in *Genealogia*, XIV, 12, Osgood, p. 62, where he also states that poets are ‘forbidden by divine command to give that which is holy to dogs, or to cast pearls before swine.’ The quotation is from *Matt.*, 7.6. Similar argument is found in Petrarch’s *Invective contra medicum*, Bk. III, in *Prose*, p. 672.



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1, p. 6). The act of interpretation represents a common aspect shared by poetry, dreams, and (mystical) visions, and has a twofold purpose. Through interpretation full understanding of a text is achieved, be it poetic or biblical. Secondly, interpretation enables people to disentangle falsehood from truth in oneiric phenomena as well as in poetry. This is even more so when dream and poetry intermingle in the genre of dream visions. Dreams are the ideal structural frame to a narration requiring interpretation, discernment between truth and falsehood, between literal and allegorical. The apparent meaning and the deep significance of dreams have been acknowledged in human experience in the course of time from at least Artemidorus to include contemporary psychology, and in cross-cultural studies.<sup>105</sup> In Chaucer's works dreams require interpretation too, as the following section explores.

### 3.2. *Dream within Sleep*

Medieval dreaming is associated with a network of metaphors widely employed in the Middle Ages related to sleep, night, the poet's bedchamber, and its little bed, *lectulum*. These images are so closely related that they form a network of metaphors widely employed in the Middle Ages. In this section the multifaceted significance of sleep is explored beyond the veil of the *littera*, the literal meaning. First a brief *excursus* on the significance of these elements from the perspective of Patristic literature will be made. The second part of the section will show how the same symbols are appropriated by seminal medieval poets including Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer.

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<sup>105</sup> See for instance *Le rêve et les sociétés humaines*, R. Caillois and G. E. von Grunebaum eds., Paris, Gallimard, 1967.

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### Sleep and the Patristic Tradition

Sleep is a figurative symbolic image that a number of Patristic writers explicate when glossing the Holy Writ. As symbols convey more than one significance, even opposing ones,<sup>106</sup> similarly, sleep points to meanings that are opposed to one another. The symbolic language aims at conveying impressions, sensations that could not otherwise be expressed through words.<sup>107</sup> Its significance is not unambiguous. Conversely, its connotations range from sin, ignorance, through to the quiet state of contemplation.

Rabanus Maurus (788-856) expresses that in the Holy Writ the same image has various levels of significance, 'not only diverse, but even opposed'.<sup>108</sup> As to sleep in the context of *The Song of Songs* he equals it to *contemplatio*, the mental state of quietness which leads to contemplation; he also acknowledges the sleep of sin; illness; and the sleep as metaphor for death.<sup>109</sup>

Sleep employed to signify sin is an image familiar in the writings of Augustine, Bede and Gregory the Great. Gregory parallels sleep, death and sin and quotes St Paul's

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<sup>106</sup> See U. Eco, 'Sul simbolo', in *Sulla letteratura*, Milano, Bompiani, 2002, pp. 152-171, pp. 156-8.

<sup>107</sup> See E. Fromm, *Il linguaggio dimenticato*, Milano, Garzanti, 1977, pp. 15 ff.

<sup>108</sup> 'Ipsa nimirum una eademque res non solum diversam, sed et adversam aliquando in Scriptura sacra significationem habere potest', Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae in universam sacram Scripturam*, PL 112, col. 850.

<sup>109</sup> 'Dormitio est quies vitae, ut in Cantico: 'Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat', id est in contemplatione quiesco. *Dormitio*, torpor, ut in Paulo: 'Surge qui dormis' id est, qui ab utili opere torpes. *Dormitio* mors, ut in Evangelio: 'Lazarus, amicus noster, dormit', id est, mortuus est. *Dormitio*, aegritudo, ut in Evangelio: 'Dormitaverunt omnes et dormierunt', quod per pondus aegritudinis pervenitur ad somnum mortis. *Dormitio*, excaecatio, ut in Psalmis: 'Dormitaverunt omnes, qui ascenderunt', id est, superbi omnes excaecantur. *Dormire*, in peccatum cadere, ut in psalmo: 'Dormitavit anima mea prae (taedio)', id est, in peccato saepe lapsus sum [...]'] [*Dormitio* is the quietness of life, as in the *Song of Songs*: 'I am asleep but my heart is awake', that is to say I rest in contemplation. *Dormitio*, torpor as in St Paul: 'Wake up those of you who are asleep', that is to say those who are indolent and refrain from useful works. *Dormitio* is death as in the Gospel: 'Our friend, Lazarus, is asleep', that is to say he is dead. *Dormitio*, illness, as in the Gospel: 'They all slumbered and slept', through the burden of illness they arrived at the sleep of death. *Dormitio*, blindness, as in the Psalms: 'they have all slumbered that mounted', that is to say those who are arrogant are blinded. To sleep, to fall in sin, as in the Psalm: 'My soul fell asleep in (sadness)', that is to say, I often fall in sin [...]']', Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae in universam sacram Scripturam*, PL 112, col. 913. Emphasis added.

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admonition to wake up from the sleep of sin.<sup>110</sup> Sleep is defined through a variety of connotations each of which corresponds to a precise term.<sup>111</sup> After mentioning the three types of sleep Gregory lingers on the beneficial effects of 'quies' as it is conceived in *The Song of Songs*. He interprets 'ego dormio' as the holy mind abandoning the noise of the temporal world concentrating on the knowledge of its inner part. Alanus de Insulis follows Gregory's tripartite subdivision of sleep. The highest leads to contemplation, the second occurs when the animal virtues repose, the lowest takes place when reason sleeps. He also comments on the level of truthfulness of the images seen in each kind of sleep.<sup>112</sup> When explicating the

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<sup>110</sup> 'Dormire namque est in peccatis jacere. [...] Paulus discipulis diceret: *Evigilate, justi, et nolite peccare* (I Cr. XV, 34). Unde et auditorem suum admonet, dicens: *Surge qui dormis, et exsurge a mortuis, illuminabit te Christus* (Ephes. V, 14). Et rursum: *Hora est jam nos de somno surgere* (Rom. XIII, 11)' [To sleep is lying in sin. [...] The disciple Paul says: Awake, you right ones, and avoid sin (I Cr. XV, 34). And he admonishes those who listen to him and says: Awake you who are asleep, awake from the dead, Christ has enlightened you (Ephes. V, 14). And: Now it is time to awake from sleep (Rom. XIII, 11)], Gregory the Great, *Moralium Libri sive Expositio in Librum Beati Job. Pars I*, Lib. VIII, PL 75, [cols. 509-1162] col. 813 C.

<sup>111</sup> 'Sed prius sciendum est quia in Scriptura sacra figurate positus tribus modis somnus accipitur. Aliquando enim somno mors carnis, aliquando torpor negligentiae, aliquando vero exprimitur, calcatis terrenis desideriis, quies vitae. Somni namque vel dormitionis nomine carnis mors intimatur, sicut Paulus ait: [...] Somno rursum torpor negligentiae designatur, sicut ab eodem Paulo dicitur: *Hora est jam nos de somno surgere* (Rom. XIII, 11). [...] Somno quoque calcatis carnis desideriis quies vitae figuratur, sicut sponsae voce in canticorum Cantico dicitur: *Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat* (Cant. V, 2); quia videlicet sancta mens quo se ab strepitu temporalis concupiscentiae comprimit, eo verius interna cognoscit; et tanto alacrius ad intima vigilat, quanto se ab exteriori inquietudine occultat' [But first we must know that, in holy Scripture, sleep, when put figuratively, is understood in three senses. For sometimes we have expressed by sleep the death of flesh, sometimes the stupefaction of neglect, and sometimes tranquillity of life, upon the earthly desires being trodden underfoot. Thus, by the designation of sleep or slumbering the death of the flesh is implied; as when Paul says: [...]. Again, by sleep is designated the stupefaction of neglect; as where it said by that same Paul, *Now it is high time to awake out of sleep*. And again, Awake, ye righteous, and sin not (Rom. XIII, 11). [...] By sleep too is represented tranquillity of life, when the carnal desires are trodden down; as where these words are uttered by the voice of the spouse in the Song of Songs, *I sleep but my heart waketh*. For, in truth, in proportion as the holy mind withholds itself from the turmoil of temporal desire, the more thoroughly it attains to know the things of the interior, and is the more quick and awake to inward concerns, the more it withdraws itself out of sight from external disquietude], Gregory the Great, *Moralium Libri, Pars I*, PL 75, Lib. V, caput XXXI [rec. XXII], col. 708D, *Morals on the Book of Job*, Oxford, J.H.Parker, 1844, pp. 282-3. It must be noticed that in this translation the term 'torpor' is rendered as 'stupefaction', which does not conserve the significance of sleep as torpor.

<sup>112</sup> '[T]riplex est somnus. Est somnus quando quis rapitur ad contemplationem coelestium, et tunc quiescent naturales vires; de quo dicitur: *Misit Dominus soporem in Adam* (Gen. II); et alius somnus, quando quiescent animales virtutes, et operantur naturales. [...] Tertius somnus est quando dormit ratio, et sensualitas exorbitant. Primus somnus fit supra hominem; secundus secundum hominem; tertius infra hominem. Primus miraculosus, secundus imaginarius, tertius monstruosus. Per primum fit homo Deus, per secundum spiritus, per tertium pecus. In primo somno somniat vera, in secundo monstruosa; tertius vero fit nocte peccati, in tenebris vitii, in umbra delicti' [There are three kinds of sleep. Sleep is when someone is ravished towards contemplation of heavenly matters, when the natural forces are quiet; therefore it is said: *God made Adam fall asleep* (Gen. II); another sleep is when

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meaning of 'surge qui dormis', Alanus compares the sleeper to a slothful person, and mentions the three kinds of sleep.<sup>113</sup>

### Terms defining 'sleep'

Gregory deploys a number of terms to identify various types of sleeping and their relative connotations (see n. 110, 111). 'Somnus' is an umbrella term whose significance can take on both negative and positive constructions depending on the context within which it is employed. 'Torpor', stands for 'pigritia', sloth, as seen in Alanus too. Rabanus' 'dormitio' indicates the quiet state of repose that leads to contemplation. It is this very quiet state, 'quies', that is found in the writings of medieval poets reflecting upon meditation and composing poetry. Finally 'sopor' is the term defining Adam's sleep while Eve is being created and would refer to 'ecstasy' in Alanus' text (see note 112). As to this term Le Goff has pointed out that in the context of Genesis 'sopor' was translated erroneously as 'ecstasy' in the

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the animal virtues are quiet and the natural ones operate. [...] the third kind of sleep is when reason sleeps, and sensuality wanders. The first sleep occurs above man; the second according to man; the third below man. The first is miraculous, the second is imaginary, the third monstrous. Through the first man becomes God, through the second he becomes spirit, through the third a sheep (beast). During the first sleep one dreams true things, during the second monstrous ones, the third occurs in the night of sin, in the darkness of vices, in the shade of sins], Alanus de Insulis, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, 48, PL 210, 195-6. Later Alanus also lingers on the various kinds of 'nights' and 'darkness', see *ibid.*, cols. 196-7.

<sup>113</sup> 'Dormit, inquam, piger clausis oculis mentis, qui nec ad bona intuitum dirigit, nec ad videndum necessaria oculum mentis aperit. Sed dum se in terrena appetendo incurvat, in somno mentis positus, quasi phantasmata somniat. Sunt autem tres species somnii. Primum et praecipuum est contemplationis, per quod rapitur homo ad videndum coelestia. Secundum est, imaginationis, per quod imaginatur visibilia. Tertium autem est, pigrityae, per quod somniat stulta' [I say, the lazy one sleeps with the eyes of the mind closed, and he neither addresses his look towards good things nor he opens the eyes of his mind to see the necessary things. While he bends down desiring earthly things, lying in the sleep of his mind, he dreams (images) near to phantoms. However there are three kinds of sleep. The first one and main is contemplation, by means of which man is ravished to see heavenly things. The second is imagination, by which he imagines the things that are possible to be seen. But the third one is sloth by which he dreams silly things], Alanus de Insulis, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, vii, PL CCX, col. 126. For the connotation of sloth in sleep and dreams, see also B. G. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 55; and Newman, p. 122.

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Septuagint, and as 'sopor' by Jerome. The original Hebrew in contrast denotes a light sleep. 'Sopor' is a genre of dream which occurs in the morning sleep.<sup>114</sup>

### Dreams, Night, Lectulum

The significance of dreams is related to the connotation conveyed by sleep. They symbolise the earthly desires that the 'sleeping' men wish to acquire.<sup>115</sup> When sleep equals ignorance, dreams symbolise the false opinions held by human beings in this life.<sup>116</sup> In particular Jerome employs sleep to signify human life and the dreams within it as false human knowledge.<sup>117</sup>

Night, maintains Gregory the Great, stands for the present life on earth which is surrounded by the fog of ignorance.<sup>118</sup> He quotes the image employed by Isaiah 'Anima mea desideravit te in nocte' and explains it as 'the darkness of the present life'.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, in his comment upon the *Song of Songs* Bede glosses the night as the darkness of ignorance, 'tenebris profundae ignorantiae'.<sup>120</sup> Walafriid Strabo (808-849) illustrates how the various aspects of the experience of the soul expressed in terms of

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<sup>114</sup> J. Le Goff, 'Le Christianisme et les rêves', in *I sogni nel Medioevo. Seminario internazionale, Roma 2-4 ottobre 1983*, ed. T. Gregory, Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985, p. 207. In Alanus' *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, the reference to *Genesis* recurs twice: in cap. VII, col. 126, and in cap. XLVIII, col. 193. Both times 'sopor' has the value of 'ecstasy' or 'contemplation'.

<sup>115</sup> See Newman, pp. 120-1, who refers to Origen, Philo and Gregory the Great.

<sup>116</sup> See Newman, pp. 121-22, who mentions Tertullian, Prudentius, and Scotus Erigena who referred to pagan philosophers.

<sup>117</sup> See Newman, pp. 121-2; Newman remarks that this metaphor can already be found in Plotin who inherited it from Plato, and that the metaphor sleep-death too derives from Greek philosophy where sleep corresponds to spiritual torpor.

<sup>118</sup> 'Nox quippe est vita praesens, in qua quandiu sumus, per hoc quod interna conspiciamus, sub incerta imaginatione caligamus' [Night is the present life. As long as we are in it, we see what we perceive as inner matters as surrounded by a fog because of the uncertain imagination], Gregory the Great, *Moralium Libri sive Expositio in Librum Beati Job. Pars II*, 23, 20, PL 76, col. 274.

<sup>119</sup> Isaiah, 26. 9. Gregory explains it as follows: 'Ac si diceret: In hac obscuritate vitae praesentis videre te appeto' [And says: in the darkness of the present life I wish to see you], *Moralium Libri sive Expositio in Librum Beati Job, Pars II*, Lib. XXIII, PL 76, col. 274.

<sup>120</sup> [The darkness of deep ignorance], Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum allegorica expositio*, PL 91, col. 1118. See also Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae in Universam sacram Scripturam*, PL 112, col. 914. Rabanus Maurus also glosses 'ebrietas' whose meaning ranges from the joy of heavenly grace, 'gaudium supernae gratiae', to the darkness of ignorance, 'qui ebrii sunt, nocte ebrii sunt'. Here again the image of 'ebrietas' conveys apparently contradictory meanings.

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night, and of bed, *lectulum*, a quiet place withdrawn from the earthly concerns.<sup>121</sup> The bedchamber and the little bed in it represent an enclosed space where the mental state of quietness is searched for: the 'quies' permits the soul to detach from daily concerns, in order to achieve the state of repose.

### The Bedchamber

Walafrid Strabo's and Gregory's reflections lead from the private bedchamber of the ascetic withdrawn from the world to that of the medieval poet. The act of withdrawing to a private place, 'secretum' – as Strabo states – is exactly what Petrarch illustrates in his work by the same title. The way medieval poets assimilate the metaphor of dreams and sleep reveals that the literary attitude of entering the state of composition is similar to the mystics' accessing the meditative state. Although criticism has addressed dream poetry extensively to date, the transitional states of awareness common to both poets and mystics, and the process of entering the oneiric state as metaphor of an intense state of awareness, metaphor of the poetic composition in relation to dream poetry, have been overlooked.<sup>122</sup> And yet the metaphor of dream-sleep expresses the inner experience of the soul. Fundamental aspects shared by meditatives and poets are evident. Firstly the metaphor of dream in

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<sup>121</sup> 'Moraliter *lectulum* sibi sancta anima in *nocte* facit, dum omnes mundi perturbationes fugiens, *secretum*, in quo requiescit, comparat. In hoc *lecto* dilectum quaerit: quia dum sollicitudinibus vacat, in ejus inquisitione quomodo ad illum perveniat *requiescit*: sed dum in mundo vivit, *tenebras* mundi a se perfecte non excutit et quanto gravius patitur, eo frequentius quaerit, et ferventius eum, quo invento tenebras amplius non patitur. [...] In *lectulo*. Ex quo Adam peccavit, coepit homo in terrenis *quiescere*, et tamen duce ratione quasi per *somnium* veram beatitudinem intelliges, ipsam in terrenis putabat consistere' [According to its nature the holy soul makes a *little bed* for itself in the *night*, while escaping all the earthly concerns, it prepares a *private place* in which it reposes. In this *bed* it searches for delight: in that whilst it is empty from concerns, it *reposes* in its research of the manner to achieve this: but while it lives in the world, it does not shake off the *darkness* of the world perfectly, and the more gravely it suffers, the more frequently and the more fervently it searches for it. Once found this, it does not suffer the darkness any more [...] In the little bed. Since the time when Adam sinned, man began to rest in earthly matters and yet by means of the lead of reason you have an insight of the true bliss as through a *dream*, which it was thought that it consisted in earthly matters], Walafrid Strabo, *Glossa ordinaria, Canticum Canticorum*, PL 113, col. 1142. Emphasis added.

<sup>122</sup> Carruthers parallels the entering the chamber and the act of meditating, *Craft of Thought*, p. 174.

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one's bedchamber conveys the concept of the aloneness of the searcher.<sup>123</sup> As dreaming is a solitary activity, so is the experience of the soul, be it religious or poetic. Secondly dreams represent the exquisitely individual inner journey of the soul, as the cause, the significance, and the purpose of the dream lie within the dreamer. Similarly the poets are the only possible creators of their verses. Thirdly, only when the holy mind abandons the noise of worldly desires, does it achieve a truer knowledge of the inner experience. Whilst expounding the allegorical significance of the biblical 'ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat', Gregory the Great underscores the inner knowledge that is achieved once far from the daily world.<sup>124</sup>

The urge to meditate on the most intimate human essence is shared by the poets who withdraw to their bedchamber to compose. The following discussion investigates how crucial the poet's solitude is in Petrarch's reflections. The contrast between the internal and the external world is marked by the noise, which leads to restlessness. Interestingly this very aspect of lack of repose is the first element characterising Chaucer's approach to dream poetry. The poet's lack of sleep in *BD* acquires a new significance, as will be explored below. Before moving on to analyse *BD* and Chaucer's dream poems, the views of the seminal Italian medieval poets are explored briefly, illustrating the concealed significance of sleep. It will be shown how the poetic and mystical journey of the soul is analogous, and how the imagery of dream and sleep is applied to express both experiences.

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<sup>123</sup> See Newman, p. 254.

<sup>124</sup> '[...] sicut sponsae voce in canticorum Cantico dicitur: Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat (*Cant.* V, 2); quia videlicet sancta mens quo se ab strepitu temporalis concupiscentiae comprimit, eo verius *interna cognoscit*, et tanto alacrius ad *intima* vigilat, quanto se ab exteriori inquietudine occultat.' Gregory the Great, *Moralium Libri, Pars I, PL* 75, Lib. V, caput XXXI [rec. XXII] col. 708D. Emphasis added. For the translation see p. 161, note 111.

### 3.3. The Poet's Sleep

Only the poet with his verses awakes people from bodily *sleep* to the *waking* of the mind; from the *dark* and thick *obscurity* of ignorance he discerns the light and beautiful brilliance of truth; he calls from *death* to *life*, from the oblivion of heavenly and divine matters to their remembrance and acknowledgment. [...] He describes beautiful and lofty operations in great abundance and with beautiful *figures*. Finally one can state that that: [there is] Nothing in the world [that] verses cannot [achieve].<sup>125</sup>

With these words Bernardino Daniello (1500-65) expresses the function of the poet's verses by employing exactly the same metaphor of bodily sleep; of the darkness of ignorance as opposed to the brilliance of truth; and the dichotomy death-life. He concludes by stating that the poet performs all these 'high operations' by means of 'figures', which recall the image of the true significance concealed beneath the cortex. The extract shows how rooted the metaphor of sleep remained in the course of centuries, given that the images employed still conserve their significance as in Patristic writing. The 'bodily sleep' representing both ignorance and the torpor of sloth, is removed by the poet's verses. The poet is then the one who 'awakes' his audience from ignorance by pointing to the splendid truth, and through almost divine powers he calls people from death to life, that is to say he has the power to recall the divine things he describes through beautiful figures.

#### Dante and Boccaccio on Sleep

The *Divine Comedy* is envisaged as a vision onto the netherworld, although it is not framed as a dream vision. However, the metaphor of sleep appears from the outset: the poet finds himself in the midst of the forest in a state of sleep which prevents

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<sup>125</sup> 'Solo il poeta co' suoi versi risveglia altrui dal *sonno* corporeo alle vigilie della mente; dalle *oscur*e e folte *tenebre* della *ignoranza* scorge nel chiaro e bello splendore del vero; richiama *dalla morte alla vita*, dalla oblivione delle cose celesti e divine alla rimembranza e riconoscenza di quelle [...]; altrui belle et alte operazioni con grandissima copia e con bellissime *figure* descrive. Finalmente si può dir che: Nulla al mondo è che non possino i versi', Bernardino Daniello, *Della poetica*. Emphasis added. <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [accessed 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010]



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him from knowing why he has arrived there.<sup>126</sup> What is the significance of Dante's sleep? As Dante's commentator, Boccaccio distinguishes two main kinds of sleep: bodily and mental, each of which is subdivided into two subgenres. Bodily sleep is natural sleep that maintains bodily health. Once nature has restored the virtues exhausted during waking, the body awakes.<sup>127</sup> The second subgenre refers to sleep standing for death.<sup>128</sup>

The significance of mental sleep also takes on the allegorical nuance of sloth and negligence.<sup>129</sup> The subgenre of mental sleep is distinguished into temporary and perennial. Sleep is temporary when the human being 'awakes' from the state of sin through divine grace. After acknowledging his errors, the sinner reconciles with God and places reason 'on the highest seat of the soul again'.<sup>130</sup> Perennial mental sleep

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<sup>126</sup> 'Io non so ben ridir com'i' v'intrai, / tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto' [I cannot say how I entered there / as I was so full with sleep at that point], D. Alighieri, *Inf.*, I, ll. 10-11.

<sup>127</sup> 'Delle quali l'una è naturale, e puossi dire esser quella la quale naturalmente in noi si richiede in nudrimento e conservazione della nostra sanità: il quale, occupandoci, lega e quasi oziose rende tutte le nostre potenzie sensitive e le 'ntellettive, per ciò che, perseverante esso, nè sentiamo nè intendiamo alcuna cosa; di che a' morti simili divegnamo' [One is natural and one can say that it is the one that we need for nourishing and conserving our health; by overcoming us, this binds and makes all our powers of the senses and of the intellect nearly lazy. That is why, while it lasts, we can neither feel nor understand anything; so that we become similar to dead], Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, Canto I, p. 60. On commenting on the kind of sleep mentioned in the opening of the fourth Canto Boccaccio states that sleep is thought to be caused by a decrease of internal heat. He also recalls that others deem it to be the repose from the animal virtues with intensification of the natural ones, Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, Canto IV, pp. 170. Incidentally Boccaccio's detailed exposition on sleep immediately follows on from the reflection upon the motive as to why poets conceal the true allegorical sense of poetry beneath the rough bark of the literal level. See Poetry and Theology, p. 155.

<sup>128</sup> 'L'altra maniera del corporale sonno è quella, dalla quale vinta ogni corporale potenza, si separa l'anima dal corpo e, senza alcuna cosa sentire o potere o sapere, immobili giacciamo e giaceremo infino al dì novissimo senza poterci levare.' [The other manner of the physical sleep is the one that separates the soul from the body, having overcome every physical power. Then without being able to feel, or to have the capacity, or know anything, we lie and we will lie still not being able to rise until the very new day.] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, Canto I, p. 60.

<sup>129</sup> 'Il sonno mentale, allegoricamente parlando, è quello quando l'anima, sottoposta la ragione a' carnali appetiti, vinta dalle concupiscenze temporali, s'adormenta in esse e oziosa e negligente diventa [...]'. [Allegorically speaking, mental sleep is when the soul – after submitting reason to physical desires – is won by temporal desires; it falls asleep and becomes slothful and negligent.] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, Canto I, pp. 60. To elucidate this kind of sleep Boccaccio evokes St Paul's warning: 'Hora est iam nos de somno surgere' *Esposizioni*, p. 60. Cfr. St Paul, *Rom.* 13, 11. This is the same advice quoted by Gregory the Great when interpreting the three significances of sleep (see p. 160).

<sup>130</sup> 'Temporale è quando ne' peccati e nelle colpe nostre inviluppato dormiamo [...] E talvolta avviene per sola benignità di Dio che noi ci risvegliamo e, riconosciuti i nostri errori e le nostre colpe, per la penitenza levandoci, ci riconciliamo a Dio, il quale non vuole la morte de' peccatori; e, a lui riconciliati, ripognamo, mediante la sua grazia, la ragione, sì come donna e maestra della nostra vita,

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occurs when the human being dies while still a sinner, thus the soul will reside with the damned souls for eternity. The souls are said to be 'sleeping in the sleep of misery' which denotes the condition of the souls damned for eternity.<sup>131</sup> Dante's sleep which leads him into the forest is allegorical mental sleep, in which a person following sensorial desires rather than reason loses the path to truth.<sup>132</sup>

#### Petrarch: Sleep, and Oneiric Images

According to Petrarch sleep maintains its multi-layered significance of ignorance, and represents human life on earth as opposed to the real life in the afterlife. It conserves its allegorical significance, as has been seen in Patristic authors, and it is related to a network of images including the bedchamber, Petrarch's 'chiuso loco', enclosed space. It denotes sin, and ignorance, but also mental quietness.<sup>133</sup> Sleep also conveys

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nella suprema sedia dell'anima, ogni scellerata operazione per lo suo imperio scalpitando e discacciando da noi', [It is temporal when we sleep shrouded/ envelopped in our guilt [...]] Sometimes it occurs only through God's benignity we wake up and – after acknowledging our errors and our guilt – rising because of compunction, we reconcile with God, who does not want the sinners' death. Once we are reconciled with him, through his grace, we place reason – as woman and master of our life – in the supreme seat of the soul. We fret and remove from us every iniquitous operation because of her (reason's) government], Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, Canto I, pp. 60-61.

<sup>131</sup> 'Perpetuo è quel sonno mentale, il quale, mentre che ostinatamente ne' nostri peccati perseveriamo, ne sopraggiugne l'ora ultima della presente vita e, in esso adormentati, nell'altra passiamo, là dove, non meritata la misericordia di Dio, in sempiterno co' miseri in tal guisa passati dimoriamo: li quali si dicono dormire nel sonno della miseria, in quanto hanno perduto il poter vedere, conoscere e gustare il bene dello 'ntelletto, nel quale consiste la gloria de' beati' [Eternal mental sleep is the one that occurs at the last hour of our present life, while we obstinate persevere in our sins. Whilst we are asleep we pass on in the next one, there where we stay eternally in that manner together with the miserable ones – as we have not deserved God's mercy. They are said to sleep in the sleep of misery, as they have lost the ability to see, know, and taste the good of the intellect, which is the blissed ones' glory], Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 61.

<sup>132</sup> 'È adunque questo sonno mentale quello del quale il nostro autore vuole che qui allegoricamente s'intenda; nel quale ciascuno, che si diletta più di seguir l'appetito che la ragione, è veramente legato, e ismarisce, anzi perde, la via della verità, alla quale in eterno non può ritornare' [Therefore it is this mental sleep that our author wishes here to be understood. In this everyone who delights in following his appetites more than reason, is bound and gets lost. In fact he loses the way of truth, to which he cannot return for the eternity], Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, p. 61.

<sup>133</sup> Commenting on Virgil's *Aeneid* Petrarch asserts that in addition to the 'material sense' also a 'moral sense' can be identified. Aeneas falling asleep on the ship denotes that the hero finds the quietness of his spirit, 'la calma dello spirito', through the righteousness of his aim, 'rettitudine del suo consiglio', F. Petrarch, *Lettere Senili, volgarizzate e dichiarate con note da G. Fracassetti*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1869, Vol. I., p. 247, Letter IV, 5, addressed to Federico Aretino. Here Petrarch explains that the winds represents passions; the dark caves where the winds find shelter represent the human breast where passions reside, as also put forth by Plato; the forest stands for human life full of darkness and errors.

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a negative connotation. It represents ignorance imbued in human life and a state of torpor during which the mind is not ready to grasp the real significance of events. He applies this metaphor to himself when Augustine's words, he maintains, have woken him up from a deep sleep. And yet because of his mortal nature his eyes close again.<sup>134</sup>

Petrarch's attitude towards dreams is twofold. He rejects dreams as a means of divination. And yet he is fascinated by dreams as he himself experienced two visions which proved true. On the other hand he is attentive to the motif. In his prose he often introduces dreams and images generated by them. His *Triumphs* are structured within the oneiric framework, *Africa* develops from Scipio's dream, and his *Canzoniere* includes episodes of dream and sleep.<sup>135</sup>

In expressing his scepticism of prophetic dreams, Petrarch agrees with Cicero that dreams should not be deemed divine.<sup>136</sup> He witnesses Fortune's power rather than acknowledging faith in the prophetic power of dreams.<sup>137</sup> Despite his disbelief

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<sup>134</sup> 'Ais enim michi, philosophica etiam nunc et poeticam ruminanti, Augustini dicta quasi quedam somnia videri. Melius dixisse illa relegenti totam michi vitam meam nichil videri aliud quam leve somnium fugacissimumque fantasma. Itaque lectione illa excitator interdum velut e somno gravissimo; sed urgente mortalitatis sarcina, palpebre rursus coeunt; et iterum expergiscor, et iterum et iterum obdormio. Voluntates mee fluctuant et desideria discordant et discordando me lacerant. Sic adversus interiorem hominem exterior pugnat [...]' [You say that, while ruminating philosophical and poetic thoughts, I have to consider Augustine's words as dreams. You would have spoken better if you had told me – who am reading them again – that my life appears nothing but a light and transient phantom. Whilst reading them I sometimes awake as from a deep sleep; yet because of the burden of my mortal nature, my eyes close again. Then I rouse again and fall asleep again. My will sways, my desires clash and by clashing they tear/torture me. Thus my external part fights against my internal [...]], F. Petrarch, *Familiars*, II, 9, *Responsio ad quandam iocosam epistolam Iacobi de Columna Lombariensis episcopi*, in *Prose*, p. 822.

<sup>135</sup> See for instance Sonnet 212 'Beato in sogno e di languir contento'. Sonnet 210 introduces a flashback in a dream which is a premonition; Laura also appears in Sonnet 359. Dreams are a means of communicating with Laura after her death, see F. J. Jones, *The Structure of Petrarch's Canzoniere: a Chronological, Psychological, and Stylistic Analysis*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1995, p. 258.

<sup>136</sup> The poet expresses his mind on dreams in *Familiars* V, 7, and in *Rerum memorandarum* (IV, 40, 1). See also *Triumphs*, ed. M. Ariani, pp. 20 ff.

<sup>137</sup> Petrarch asserts that if a dream has a somewhat thin relationship with reality it is not surprising: as people dream everyday, they have a high possibility of dreaming plausible situations. 'Quanto satius fuerat docere ut de mille unum non accidit cui vel tenuis sit cum veritate cognatio! Totis autem

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Petrarch experiences how dreams can be bearers of true knowledge.<sup>138</sup> Although he experiences prophetic dreams, Petrarch concludes his letter by reiterating the concept that for one dream coming true, many more are meaningless.<sup>139</sup>

One could infer that Petrarch distinguishes between physiological 'dreams' and literary 'dreams'. Petrarch's reflections upon oneiric images is of particular interest as it illustrates how they are interrelated with the poet's search for mental quiet, and with literary composition. He elaborates upon the function of the mind in relation to how images are generated during dreams. He is aware that these images are out of the control of the mind. In effect in dreams one could see images that during waking would not be imaginable or that would even be deplored. The result is the loss of mental quietness. The soul, described as 'nearly drunk', 'quasi ebriam', and deceived by sleep, travels into regions where it would never let herself be led when in a wakeful and sober state.<sup>140</sup>

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noctibus dormientes ac sepe meridianes, quid mirum si nonnunquam vero quedam proxima videmus? Horum aliqua iam hinc scribere aggrediar — falsa enim quis caperet liber? —; et hec quoque sic legi volo, ut agnoscatur potius fortune vis quam fides sompniis habeatur' [How preferable it would be to teach that amongst thousands of dreams not one occurs that has a thin relationship with truth! As we sleep every night and often also in the afternoon, why would it be strange if we dream things near to truth? I have already begun to write about these things — which book would include false arguments? And I also desire these things to be read thus, in order to acknowledge the power of Fortune rather than having faith in dreams], *Rerum memorandarum*, IV, 40, 1 (13, 14) <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [Accessed 26th April 2010]

<sup>138</sup> His two oneiric visions can be deemed trustworthy on the very base of his scepticism. Two of Petrarch's friends appear to him in two different dreams. The first is very ill whom the doctors judge so near death that they have stopped treating him. The apparition convinces the poet that he can still be saved, as this later transpires in reality. In the second another friend takes his leave from the poet on the specific day of his death, F. Petrarch, *Lettere delle cose Familiari, libri ventiquattro, Lettere varie, Libro unico*, ed. G. Fracassetti, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1864, vol. II, p. 35, Letter V, 7, addressed to Giovanni D'Andrea di Bologna.

<sup>139</sup> Petrarch, *Familiari*, Letter V, 7, vol. II, p. 40.

<sup>140</sup> 'Dedarant hoc ita esse portentum somniorum et turbulentissime visiones, de quibus et si multa magnis ingeniis disputata sint, nondum tamen exacte satis ad ima perventum reor: tam multe sunt species, tam varie rerum forme, totiens nullis aut prorsus ignotis causis quies nostra concutitur, dumque omnia nunquam cogitavimus aut cogitaturi essemus in somnis occurrunt et quod in vigilantibus non auderent in dormientibus pertentant atque interdum peragunt in nobis quod evigilantes adversaremur et experrecti flemus; ita somno obrutam et quasi ebriam animam eo dolis protrahunt, quo aperta vi nunquam vigil et sobria trahi posset' [They maintain the wonder of dreams and visions. Although many great intellects have discussed them at large I deem that we have not achieved yet the exact grounding. There are so many species, so many forms of things that our quietness is worried by insubstantial or even unknown. And yet all that we do not have and would

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To keep mental quietness, Petrarch advises sobriety of food and of body. Above all he stresses the necessity of taming the mind.<sup>141</sup> In so doing Petrarch's warning echoes Hilton's and Rolle's advice to novices, who recommend moderateness in food and drink and exhort to control the flux of thoughts (see p. 90). The poet also explores the power of tears and how they contribute to the loss of mental control. In order to conserve the control of the mind Petrarch theorises an agreement with his eyes.

It is essential for the safeguard of the soul that dangerous images are avoided. Thus the soul can wake, 'vegliare', at the limen to keep the ranks of phantoms, 'fantasmatum', far – also when the eyes are kept open.<sup>142</sup> Here Petrarch acknowledges two crucial points: the concept of limen, and that visions can also occur with eyes open, which can be read as not in a state of sleep. The former point suggests the notion of border, 'in limine', where the soul needs to be the most attentive in order to filter the images originating in a space beyond the rational control of the mind. The second point conveys the idea that oneiric images can be formed also during the state of wake, as Petrarch is not referring exclusively to oneiric images formed during sleep. This is found in mystics' reflections, for instance in Hildegard and Margery who specify when their visions are seen in wakefulness.

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have never thought of, occurs in dreams; and things that those awake would not dare lightly touch, attack the sleepers and at times they give rise to things that we would remove and deplore when awake. Thus the soul - overshadowed by sleep by means of deceit, and near inebriation – is carried there where it would not let herself be carried with manifest strength during wakefulness], F. Petrarch, *De otio religioso*, II <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010].

<sup>141</sup> 'Domanda igitur et frenanda mens est' [the mind must be tamed and controlled], *De otio rel.*, II; <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010].

<sup>142</sup> 'Hinc est ut de salute anime cum oculis paciscendum sit, ut nec illi periculosis aspectibus iter pendant et illa excubet in limine apertisque licet foribus fantasmatum cuneos ab ingressu arceat' [One must reach an agreement with the eyes for the sake of the soul, so that they do not open the way to dangerous images, and so that it can wake on the border in order to keep far from the entrance – despite the eyes being open – the ranks of phantoms], Petrarch, *De otio rel.*, II <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010].

### The Poet's Tears

The outset of *Triumphhi* offers key elements to comprehend better both the poet's attitude towards writing and the writers' need for solitude. The poet's weeping gives way to sleep that overcomes him, thus his vision commences. As mentioned above, tears are connected to the poet's 'agreement with the eyes'.<sup>143</sup> In effect they slacken the control of reason and in this state the poet's sleep accepts the images formed in his imagination.<sup>144</sup> This line confirms that tears and weeping could infringe the agreement reached between reason and the poet's eyes, and in this breach the 'ranks of the phantasms'<sup>145</sup> appear to the poet. Tears are a sign of the loosened control of reason. Reason being weakened, images can be formed in the imagination and appear in front of the poet's eyes.

In this light the significance of weeping and tears in literature acquire new resonance. They recall the tears experienced by mystics along their path towards true knowledge. For mystics tears represent one of the preliminary signs of the visionary phenomenon (see ch. 2, p. 86). In literary writing the poet's (as well as the lover's) tears represent the stage preceding the vision. The male lover's weeping conveys an allegorical significance to the contemporary medieval audience. It has little to do with the feminisation of the male character (see p. 184, n. 174). In contrast it indicates a precise human condition that can be shared by poets, lovers, and mystics.

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<sup>143</sup> See also *Triumphhi*, ed. M. Ariani, Milano, Mursia, 1988, p. 21.

<sup>144</sup> '[G]ià del pianger fioco | vinto dal sonno, vidi una gran luce' [weakened by the tears | overcome by sleep, I saw a large light], Petrarch, *Trionfi*, Tr. Cup., I, ll. 10-11, p. 80.

<sup>145</sup> '[F]antasmatum cuneos', Petrarch, *De otio religioso*, II.

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### Petrarch's 'Chiuso loco'

In *Triumphs* Love, the beloved's indifference, and Spring lead the poet to the enclosed space of his bedchamber, his 'chiuso loco' (*Tr. Cup.*, I, l. 8). The enclosed room is the space where both poets and mystics withdraw to achieve their mental tranquillity, indispensable to attain the ascension to divinity or artistic creation. Petrarch often exploits the images of sleep, night, the bedchamber, together with dream. The poet expresses the bliss experienced by those who depart from the external world. He enters his cell suitable for sleep, where he attains quietness and his 'dreams', 'somnia', correspond to his actions.<sup>146</sup>

In this enclosed space the poet accomplishes the fruit of solitary life: to lift one's spirit above oneself towards heavenly matters, and to meditate upon that reality.<sup>147</sup> The poet is aware, however, that those who are not familiar with this condition have never tasted this fruit.<sup>148</sup> The enclosed place of the poet's sleep, bedchamber, and meditation are strongly related in building the system of metaphors symbolising the poet's solitary meditation. Further, Petrarch explicates that literary composition can be performed better and more freely in this space. So much so that once the poet is freed from daily encumbrance, in his solitude he knows the wings of wit.<sup>149</sup> Petrarch

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<sup>146</sup> '[C]ubiculum somno non impudicitis ydoneum ingressus, dulcem et imperturbatam excipit quietem et, siquid consopitus videt, plerunque similia vigilantis operibus sunt somnia dormientis et hac etiam vite parte felicior meliores aspicit visiones' [He enters his room appropriate for sleep and not for indecent things, and surrenders to a sweet and imperturbable quiet. And fallen asleep, his dreams are similar to his actions; and he is more blissted because he sees better visions], Petrarch, *De vita solitaria*, I, pp. 316-8.

<sup>147</sup> '[S]upra se elevatum animum inferre rebus ethereis, meditari quid illic igitur, et meditatione desiderium inflammare' [And by lifting the soul upwards towards heavenly things, meditating on the things that occur, and by means of meditation inflame the desire], *De vita solitaria*, I, p. 356.

<sup>148</sup> 'Qui, quod inexperti non intelligunt, non ultimus solitarie vite fructus est' [Those who have not experienced it, cannot understand the fruit – which is not the last – of the solitary life], Petrarch, *De vita solitaria*, I, p. 356.

<sup>149</sup> Petrarch, *De vita solitaria*, I, p. 360.

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witnesses the common experience that philosophers, saints, and poets share in their solitary life, who lifted their spirits, and enjoyed the fruit of solitude.<sup>150</sup>

Finally Petrarch illustrates what true life is as opposed to the earthly one. Agreeing with Cicero and Augustine, he asserts that what is deemed life on earth is in contrast death. In his conclusion he puts scholars, mystics, and philosophers side by side. Each of them is located in their appropriate space: the library for the scholar, the cell for the monk, the sanctuary for those who pray, the mount for the contemplatives.<sup>151</sup> Similarly 'blissed life', 'vita felix', is common to those people who devote respectively to a philosophical, poetic, holy, and prophetic life. Petrarch lists them hierarchically from philosophical to prophetic life, where the prophetic one is the exquisite summit, from reading to meditation, to intense prayer, and finally to contemplation.<sup>152</sup> Further to a hierarchical list, it can be argued that Petrarch identifies a correspondence between the activity performed and the kind of life. The prophetic life (devoted to contemplation) being the summit. Whatever the hierarchical level, the scholar, the meditative, the saint, and the prophet are all deemed to lead a similar blessed life immersed in meditation in their own space. Petrarch reiterates that those who have not experienced this life have no knowledge of it whatsoever. This recalls the attempts made by mystics to express in words what

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<sup>150</sup> 'Sentio tamen adhuc aliquid deesse, et video nunc etiam quid expectes: rem suapte natura validam exemplis amari. Longa est historia qui philosophi aut poete, quo se se altius attollerent, primum pedem in solitudine posuerunt; nam de sanctis et vulgarior et notior et longior, qui urbes spontaneo damnantes exilio, sacra sui presentia solitudinem illustrarunt' [I realize that something is still missing and I can see what you expect: that an argument valid in its nature is accompanied by instances of philosophers and poets – and it is a long discourse – who entered solitude in order to lift themselves to higher heights. The discourse concerning saints is much more popular, more renowned and longer. With a voluntary exile they left the cities and made the solitude by means of their holy presence], Petrarch, *De vita solitaria*, II, p. 407.

<sup>151</sup> '[B]ibliotheca legentium, cella meditantium, penetrale orantium, mons contemplantium' [Library for the scholars; cell for those who meditate; sanctuary for those who pray; mountain for those who contemplate], Petrarch, *De vita solitaria*, II, p. 428.

<sup>152</sup> 'Vita felix et ad omne bonum opus aptissima, vita philosophica, poetica, sancta, prophetica' [Blissed life, and very appropriate to every good action, philosophical, poetic, holy, prophetic life] *De vita solitaria*, p. 428.



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is not utterable. In effect mystical contemplation and poetic creation share this element of solitude and incommunicability. In addition to being a state of awareness only achievable on one's own, this very uniqueness is not communicable to others who remain strangers to it.

### Control of the Mind

Now the advice remains to be explored that Petrarch provides on how to govern the mind so that to achieve the blissed life, 'vita felix'. The first step the poet identifies consists in 'moderation of food and body', and to keep 'a sober soul'.<sup>153</sup> As to the physical aspect, 'hunger, waking and bodily tiredness provoke a deep sleep deprived of dreams'.<sup>154</sup> Other weapons too enable people to fight against the flesh, subjugate it to the spirit, and control the mind. As 'death enters through the window'<sup>155</sup> – as the Holy Writ teaches – one must keep a constant guard over the mind. The poet recalls Job's agreement with his eyes to avoid thinking about any maiden.<sup>156</sup> Petrarch foregrounds that Job does not state 'not to see', but rather 'not to think'. It is vain, he explains, to close one's eyes if the mind perseveres in areas where the corporeal senses are not allowed. Governance of the mind, so that the soul can be preserved, acts through both the body and the mind.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> '[V]ictus paritas et corporis, sed magis anime sobrietas multum confert', Petrarch, *De otio rel.* II <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010]

<sup>154</sup> '[F]ames et labor et vigilie que profundum somnum et somnia extinguentem provocant', Petrarch, *De otio rel.*, II.

<sup>155</sup> '[Q]uia "intrare mortem per fenestras" Scriptura nos docuit' [Because the Holy Writ teaches that 'death enters windows'], Petrarch, *De otio rel.*, II.

<sup>156</sup> 'Pepigi fedus cum oculis meis ut ne cogitarent quidem de virgine' [I have reached an agreement with my eyes so that they will not think of any maid], *De otio rel.*, II.

<sup>157</sup> 'The main weapons are [...] a sober life, meditation on death, affliction of the body, humility of the soul, circumspection and vigilance, fleeing women, soberness in clothes, remembering the Passion of Christ, waiting for the final judgement, fearing hell, and finally hope in the eternal life.' The whole passage from which the quotation has been extracted is the following, the actual quotation translated above being italicised: 'Hinc est ut de salute anime cum oculis paciscendum sit, ut nec illi periculosus aspectibus iter pandant et illa excubet in limine apertisque licet foribus fantasmatum cuneos ab ingressu arceat; hoc est carnem spiritui subiecisse et vicisse seipsam, qua nulla clarior victoria est, in qua arma precipua illa sunt, quorum partem superius attigi: parsimonia vite, meditatio mortis, afflictio

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All the techniques mentioned by Petrarch closely recall the advice provided to novices wishing to become anchorites. Firstly the governing of the body through fasting, waking, sober clothing and life; further the control on the mind exercised through silence, prayer, meditation on death, on the passion of Christ, and on eternal life. Petrarch evokes them in a manner that recalls the several stages of ascension to which mystics aspired: sober diet, praying, meditating on the Passion are key advice yielded by Rolle, Hilton, and practised by Margery Kempe; the main fight against the flux of thoughts, as recommended by the *Cloud*-author (see ch. 2, p. 90). Further, Petrarch discerns between dreams in sleep and oneiric literary states. Whereas he does not deem dreams divine, he applies the oneiric framework to a number of his works, and illustrates the mental process of poetic creation.

As demonstrated, the oneiric experience, interpreted as one of the stages of mystical contemplation and representing the transitional state of poetic creation, is a solitary condition. Like the mystic, the poet is alone. In their ineffable experience, dreams and sleeping convey the act of an entirely individual action. Composing is as solitary as dreaming. Although the genre of dream vision undergoes changes in the course of the Middle Ages the medieval 'drem' represents a narrative device which provides several outcomes. It overcomes the incommunicability indissoluble from the withdrawal into the bedchamber. It structures the relationship with the readers.<sup>158</sup> Above all it illustrates the unique and unrepeatable journey within, that the self performs.

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corporis, humilitas anime, circumscriptio et excubie, fuga mulierum, vestis asperitas, memoria passionis Cristi, iudicii expectatio, inferni metus, spes eterne vite. [...] puto vel penitus vel magna ex parte ab his tempestatibus liber erit, precipue si ieiunium et silentium diurnum, si fidelis oratio vespertina et indubitata de divina ope spes accesserint', Petrarch, *De otio rel.*, II <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>>.

<sup>158</sup> H. Phillips, 'Dream Poems' (first paragraph).

### 3.4. Lack of Sleep in 'The Book of the Duchess'

Allegorical images related to dreams including sleep, night, the bedchamber, and the bed within it, conserve the multilayered significance both in the Patristic writers and the medieval poets. Whereas in the biblical exegesis sleep acquires a multifaceted significance, whose correct interpretation depends on the context, for medieval poets sleep in their enclosed, solitary space represents the mental quietness necessary for poetic creation.

In the light of the rich figurative metaphors of dream and sleep, it cannot be deemed casual that Chaucer opts for this very set of metaphor in his first dream vision. The opening of the *BD* can be read as corresponding to the poet's journey towards literary composition. Moreover it maintains the similarities between poetic composition and mystical experience towards ascension. The eight years have been discussed at great depth.<sup>159</sup> However, in this perspective they acquire new significance. First of all defining this span of time as 'lack of sleep' rather than insomnia renders to the fore the concepts behind the allegorical image of sleep. By defining it as 'insomnia' the core significance is lost. The dreamer mentions 'lack of

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<sup>159</sup> G. L. Kittredge maintains that the dreamer is suffering from love sickness, *Chaucer and His Poetry: Lectures Delivered in 1914 on the Percy Turnbull Memorial Foundation in the Johns Hopkins University*, Cambridge [Mass.], Harvard University Press, 1915, p. 40. Sypherd and Loomis agree with Kittredge on interpreting the dreamer as hit by love sickness, respectively in 'Chaucer's Eight Years Sickness', *MLN* 20 (1905) 240-43, pp. 242-3; 'Chaucer's Eight Years Sickness', *MLN*, 59 (1944) 178-80, pp. 179-80. According to Lawlor the dreamer is an unrequited lover, 'The Pattern of Consolation in *The Book of the Duchess*', in *Chaucer Criticism, Troilus and Criseyde & the Minor Poems*, R. J. Schoeck and J. Taylor eds., London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1961, vol. 2, pp. 232-260, p. 243. D. Bethurum suggests that the dreamer is a 'sorrowing lover', 'Chaucer's Point of View as Narrator in the Love Poems', p. 215. W. Clemen remarks that unlike Froissart, Chaucer does not state the cause of the dreamer's illness, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, London, Methuen, [1963], 1968, pp. 27-9. Although J. M. Hill notices that the meaning of the eight years might be lost, he argues that the dreamer suffers from melancholy, 'The Book of the Duchess, Melancholy, and that Eight-Year Sickness', *The Chaucer Review*, 9 (1974) 35-50, p. 35. H. Phillips maintains that sickness or melancholy cannot be inferred to be caused by love on the basis of the significance of the sources, in that Chaucer presents the dreamer in 'an undefined distress and puzzlement', *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 41.

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sleep' seven times.<sup>160</sup> It is crucial to identify that Chaucer is forcibly presenting with 'lack of sleep' by his wording.

Chaucer's passage is closely based on the opening of Froissart's *Paradis d'Amours*. His rewriting removes Froissart's explicit association between the sleeplessness and unrequited love.<sup>161</sup> In contrast Chaucer contrives to offer a theme of 'defaute of slep' which is not tied to any single idea or cause. That means the image contains a multitude of potential associations for Chaucer's audience. Here a tradition well-established in the realm of mystical writing can prove illuminating. For one tradition that would have been familiar to a fourteenth-century audience is that of sleep and dreams as states which can bring access to revelation.<sup>162</sup> A crucial text from the Bible for medieval mystics was 'Ego dormio', from the *Song of Songs*, where the speaker states: 'Ego dormio sed cor meus vigilat'.<sup>163</sup> What Chaucer's culture had assimilated, however, from centuries of medieval mystical writing was not recall of a single biblical text but a whole tradition of associations between special experiences of sleep and inspired revelation.

Chaucer was no mystic. However, in his poetry he elaborates on the motifs common to dream poetry: the poet in his bedchamber falling asleep. Chaucer plays with these elements although he conserves the network of metaphors related to dream: sleep,

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<sup>160</sup> 'I may nat slepe' (l. 3); 'defaute of slep' (l. 5); 'without slep' (l. 21); 'And I ne may... slepe' (ll. 22-3); 'defaute of slepe' (l. 25); 'defaute of slep' (l. 223); 'For I ne myght [...] slepe' (ll. 227-8). John M. Hill does not employ the term 'insomnia', although he underscores the reiteration of the idea of 'lack of sleep', 'The Book of the Duchess, Melancholy, and that Eight Year Sickness'.

<sup>161</sup> BD, ll. 1-24; see Froissart, *Paradis d'Amour*, ll. 1-12. It should be noted that in the *Complaint to his Lady*, the poet explicits the love maladie, 'This Love that hath me set in such a place / That my desir [he] never wol fulfille' (ll. 15-6); 'your swete herte of stele / Is whetted now ageynes me to kene' (ll. 56-57).

<sup>162</sup> The mid-twentieth-century Patristic critics interpreted this allusion to sickness heavily-handedly, with a religious, allegorical meaning. However, it is not the case to reject the possibility of considering any metaphorical underlying level in the context of interpretations of Chaucer's works. Chaucer invokes the medieval associations that mystical writing had given the images of sleep, sickness and dream as part of his poem's exploration of the poet's state of inspiration.

<sup>163</sup> [I sleep but my heart wakes], *Song of Songs*, 5. 2.

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night, the bedchamber, and the bed. What do these images represent? What Chaucer describes at the beginning of *BD* conveys the transitional state between ordinary consciousness and poetic creation. The 'defaute of slep' suggests the lack of the quiet necessary to achieve meditation and contemplation. Once the poet has withdrawn from the external world he has to confront his within. For the poet as for the mystic it is vital to attain quietness of thoughts in order to be able to 'trance' into the desired state of creation. The poet-to-be in the opening of the *BD* is still facing his idle thoughts.

I have so many an ydel thoght,  
Purely for defaute of slep (ll. 4-5)

And later on:

For sorwful ymagynacioun  
Ys always hooly in my mynde. (*BD*, ll. 14-5)<sup>164</sup>

The poet – like a novice – tries to banish futile, worthless thoughts. When the poet's sleep is interpreted as mental quietness – the requisite to composition – the long eight years of the poet's lack of sleep lose their mere physiological connotation.<sup>165</sup> They represent the long search for poetic creation, performed within the disturbance of the world of the business and the court. They illustrate the process of conceiving, developing, and even accepting the urgency of the act of writing on the poet's part.

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<sup>164</sup> The faculty of *Ymaginacioun* is closely linked to visions. It is 'the power [...] by which sense data is formed into images, [...] and which can recreate these images in the absence of the objects themselves', J. D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition*, Ipswich, Boydell Press, 1979 p. 105. *Ymaginacioun* in the expression 'heigh ymaginacioun' (*NPT*, 3217) has been discussed at large, see R. A. Pratt, 'Latin Sources of the Nonnes Preest Tale', (Part I), *Speculum*, 47 (1972) 422-444; V. Hamm, 'Heigh Ymaginacioun', *Modern Language Notes*, 69 (1954) 394-5, who considers it as the equivalent of Dante's 'imaginativa' (*Purg.* XVII, 13). In Dante the terms 'imaginativa', 'imaginatio', and 'fantasia' are interchangeable, see *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-76, 'imaginativa'. *Ymaginacioun* is also referred to in *TC*, see ch. 4, p. 163. On 'imagination' and dreams in the arabic world, see F. Rahman, 'Le rêve, l'imagination et 'Alam al-Mithal'', in von Grunebaum G. E. and Caillois R. eds., *Le rêve et les sociétés humaines*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, pp. 407-16.

<sup>165</sup> J. Hill interprets it as 'head melancholy' that can lead to death. If it was considered only as physical illness, probably eight years of sleep deprivation would be enough span of time to lead to death literally.

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Further, this period is defined as 'sickness' (l. 36). Illness and writing are common motifs in writers' and mystics' lives. Hildegard is healed from her many years of illness when she finally wrote her visions. Margery's illness stops when she starts writing again. Chaucer's long period of pondering over the inner creative fermentation could be explained by the difficulty of accepting the idea of writing as a personal option for someone committed to the utterly noisy world of the court and diplomacy. Moreover the strict relationship between writing and suffering is not to be overlooked, as witnessed by Thomas Aquinas too.<sup>166</sup> The poet who experiences the solitude of his sleeplessness and illness in the close space of his bedroom, who turns to reading to alleviate the length of the solitary night, and who as a joke, resorts to praying to a god of sleep – of whose existence he was unaware – has given up the thinnest hope of nightly rest at both literal and metaphorical level. Only when he eventually abandons every single expectation, does he fall asleep and dreams. Mental quietness is finally achieved and subsequently within it the poetic persona sees a dream that he is able to narrate in poetic form.

The stages towards poetic composition parallel those of the mystics: illness, withdrawing from the earthly world in the solitary space of the bedchamber, where the solitary persona devotes to reading (Ovid), meditating, praying (to Morpheus), and is finally rewarded by surrendering to sleep.<sup>167</sup> As has been seen, the space of dream, sleep, the bedchamber, and the bed, is not to be intended as merely physical. It corresponds to the place in which to search for mental quietness, and for that transitional state of awareness leading to higher spheres above material matters.

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<sup>166</sup> See Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 175. For composing as an emotional process, see also M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 199-202, where she recalls how Thomas Aquinas fell prostrate praying in tears in order to overcome an intellectual difficulty.

<sup>167</sup> See *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. 35 ll. 1312-13. This scene may be deemed as comic. J. S. Russell maintains that it is 'one of the funniest passages in the poem', p. 148. Nonetheless, the poet's promise can be considered as a vow. Knight remarks that it is a 'feudal reward', *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 11.

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Here a number of details will be explored: the types of sleep implicitly referred to in the text; the importance of the poet's bedchamber; the relationship between truth and falsehood; and poetry created in a transitional state. First different types of sleep appear in the poem. Alcyone wishes to fall asleep to acquire the truth concerning Ceyx. She prays to Juno in order that the goddess sends her in her 'slep som certeyn sweven' (l. 119). She suddenly swoons 'as cold as ston' (l. 123) and the 'dede slepe / fil on hir' (ll. 127-8). Whilst Alcyone is in this state, the scene moves in the netherworld of the gods to describe Morpheus in his cave asleep in a sleep so deep that the messenger warns him to awake thrice (ll. 179; 181; 183). Albeit at first sight similar, the two kinds of sleep differ profoundly. Morpheus's represents the sleuth of inactivity; whereas Alcyone's recalls closely the *alienatio* illustrated, for instance, by Alain de Lille in *Anticlaudianus*.<sup>168</sup> In this transitional state Phronesis receives the visions, and Alcyone sees her husband's image revealing her the truth. Also the incitement to 'awake' (l. 202) addressed to the queen has a different connotations to those uttered towards Morpheus. Through the revelation of Ceyx's death Alcyone is motivated to cease her sorrows, despite his death. Similarly, in the inmost frame of the dream, the Narrator paradoxically awakes within the dream (l. 294) and commences to admire the walls of his bedchamber adorned with images from the story of Troy and of the RR before riding towards the forest. The final awakening occurs at the end of the poem when the dream is completed and the poet finds himself in his usual bedchamber, thus completing the circular structure of the poem. Correspondences between the narrative frames of the poem have been explored.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> 'An image of death which darkens light and deadens the vital element to a greater extent than ordinary sleep but less than death', *Anticlaudianus or the Good and Perfect Man*, trans. Sheridan, p. 159. See above p. 161.

<sup>169</sup> See Davidoff, pp. 102 ff.; H. Phillips, 'Structure and Consolation in *The Book of the Duchess*', *The Chaucer Review*, 16 (1981) 107-18; and H. Phillips, 'Frames and Narrators in Chaucerian Poetry', in *The*

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At this stage the Narrator's sleep can be read at two levels: he falls into a physiological sleep; or else, as has been demonstrated above, his sleep acquires a symbolic connotation representing the quiet of the mind that finally could compose, after overcoming his initial 'ydel thocht'.

Further to the dream, the dreamer's magnificent experience is signposted not only by his declaring that no authority of dream reading could understand his dream. When he is in his oneiric bedchamber, the painted walls have transformed it into a literary bedchamber. Further although the windows are closed, a sun beam shines on his bed, where the poet is still lying, 'with bryghte bemes / with many glade gilde stremes' (ll. 337-8). This recalls the moment preceding the apparition of the three Ladies to Christine de Pizan who was amazed by the splendour of the light entering her closed room.<sup>170</sup> Here, after being hit by the sun beam the dreamer will not see a mentoring figure. The dreamer's readiness to explore his new bedchamber – his peaceful transitional state – is signalled through the magnificent heavenlike landscape. The wonderful flora and fauna of the place cannot be enumerated just like the wonders that he saw in his 'sweven' (l. 442). This is the last occurrence when the Narrator mentions he is experiencing a 'drem'. During the Black Knight's tale the Dreamer narrating a wonder almost dissipates, to leave the field to the sorrowful Knight; similarly the Narrator had disappeared during the narration of Alcyone's plight.<sup>171</sup> The readers-listeners may forget that they are listening to a dream. The Narrator as intermediary between his oneiric world and the audience now disappears behind the Black Knight's tale.

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*Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, Cooper H., Mapstone S., Fichte Joerg O. eds., Oxford, Clarendon, 1997, pp. 71-97.

<sup>170</sup> '[S]oubdainement sus mon giron vi dessendre un ray de lumiere si comme se le souleil fust, et je, qui en lieu obscur estoie ou quel, a celle heure, souleil royer ne peust, tressailli', Christine di Pizan, *Cité des dames*, E. J. Richards ed., P. Caraffi trans., Roma, Carocci, 2008, p. 46.

<sup>171</sup> For inner concentric structures within the poem, see H. Phillips, 'Structure and Consolation in *The Book of the Duchess*'.



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The manner in which the Knight is first introduced deploys a number of figurative images leading to a transitional state. He is sitting under an oak, in a marvellous spring landscape – recalling a garden – pale and with no colour, as Alcyone (l. 470) and reciting a complaint. The whole scene recalls the figurative imagery of dream visions: the pale sorrowful lover composing a poem in a garden under an oak, the sacred tree of the druids.<sup>172</sup> As pointed out above (see p. 181), the reiteration of elements indicating a transition of states are deployed here. Further, at the end of the complaint the Black Knight faints ('his spirites wexen dede', l. 489). It is at this point after swooning and being immersed in deep thoughts that he neither sees nor hears the dreamer, and that he suddenly becomes aware of the Narrator-dreamer. He is not aware of the world surrounding him. Further, the Man in Black is composing in the garden in a strikingly similar manner to the way Pandarus depicts Troilus composing in a garden (see ch. 4, p. 69). An additional similarity between *BD* and *TC* can be identified in the technique employed to introduce the Narrator-dreamer in *BD* and Pandarus's first arriving at Troilus's. The dreamer appears to the Black Knight after reciting his complaint and after swooning. Similarly Pandarus first appears after Troilus has composed a complaint in his chamber. When Pandarus arrives he can hear him 'groone' (I, 549) whilst Troilus is unaware of the friend's presence in the bedroom.<sup>173</sup> Swooning in this context represents a state different from the ordinary consciousness, far from indicating feminisation of a male

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<sup>172</sup> In many poems sitting under a tree forewarns a passage to the other world: in *Sir Orfeo* the Queen sits under an apple tree, to mention one instance.

<sup>173</sup> The fact that the Man in Black is under a tree whereas Troilus is in his bedchamber does not alter the significance of the larger argument: the bedchamber as the garden have the underlying significance of a place of alienation from ordinary awareness. This is developed at a greater extent below, p. 163. Another aspect deserving attention is that while usually in dream visions the dreamer sees an apparition; here in contrast the dreamer becomes the apparition to a character within the dream vision.

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character.<sup>174</sup> Swooning and losing consciousness signpost a shift into another state. This usually occurs soon before a crucial encounter with a superior force, and it signals the ascent to a higher level of experience.<sup>175</sup>

A final aspect remains to consider: the relationship between truth and falsehood that could explain the apparent Narrator's failure to understand the Man in Black's loss. When the Narrator learns Alcyone's story he is aware that it is fictional. After admiring the literary images painted in his oneiric bedchamber the Narrator has entered a literary world. When he first perceives him, the Knight is reciting a complaint. There is no explicit reference between the poem being sung and his personal experience.<sup>176</sup> The Narrator assumes that poetic content is fictional. However, for the unrequited lover the world has been really turned upside down (ll. 599-617) since Fortune has impacted upon his life. From the audience's perspective this is consonant with the plight of Alcyone and the Narrator: both achieve awakening within sleep. The lover's complaint expresses his real loss. Poetry composed through the oneiric bedchamber and the garden is truth. When the Knight explicitly states that the Lady is dead (l. 1309), the oneiric environment soon dissolves: the forest and the oaktree dissipate, hunting comes to an end; the king's castle is foregrounded and the bell awakes the dreamer, who finds himself in bed. The return from the oaktree to the ordinary bedchamber only occupies fifteen lines.

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<sup>174</sup> On feminisation of the Black Knight and of the narrator, see E. Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992, pp. 60 ff.

<sup>175</sup> In *Inferno* Dante swoons after hearing Paolo and Francesca's words and seeing their punishment; in *Purgatorio* the poet swoons when he is carried to the following stage by the Eagle. Alain de Lille loses consciousness in front of Natura, in *De planctu Naturae*. Considering swooning and losing consciousness as feminisation of the male characters appears to apply later literary conventions to medieval matter.

<sup>176</sup> A. W. Bahr remarks that although the dreamer perceives the Knight's grief, it is natural not to assume that his wife has just died. Further, he relates D. R. Howard's instance from another culture: if one heard a cowboy singing a cowboy song on death on his own, it would not be inferred that he is singing about a person who has died in reality, *Chaucer and the Medieval World*, London, 1987, p. 156, quoted in A. W. Bahr, 'The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*', *The Chaucer Review*, 35 (2000) 43-59, p. 58, n. 20.

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Reality leads to reality. However, the plan of the dream vision has been sketched; it has really become a poem: a real elegy has been composed to commemorate Blanche. In a game of mirroring mirrors that nearly brings dizziness, within each narrative frame – Alcyone, the Man in Black, the Narrator, even for John of Gaunt as audience – poetry illustrates truth.

### 3.5. *The House of Fame*

It is commonly maintained that, after reviewing the different types of dreams in the opening of the *HF*, Chaucer moves on to argue about the causes of dreams. Lines 1-11 follow the classifications established by Macrobius and Gregory the Great. 'Dreme', 'swevene', 'avision', 'fantome', and 'oracle' derive from Macrobius's classification; 'revelation' was listed by Gregory the Great's classification,<sup>177</sup> whereas 'miracle' appears to be used here to refer to all of these phenomena as a whole. The section up to line 58 has been defined by criticism as the illustration of the causes of dreams.<sup>178</sup> However, a more attentive reading shows that the section refers to phenomena belonging to a wider state of consciousness. It not only reveals Chaucer's knowledge of these states, it can also be argued that lines 24-51 refer explicitly both to the techniques aimed to achieve the mystical experience and to contemplation. Even more impressively, it appears that Chaucer follows the stages leading to

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<sup>177</sup> 'Ilusions' (l. 493), listed also by Gregory, see ch. 1, p. 17, are mentioned during the prayer addressed to God.

<sup>178</sup> Spearing considers the Proem as a 'discussion on the causes', *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 73. *Riverside* defines lines 21-51 as 'the origins of dreams'. It does acknowledge that the catalogue progresses 'from inward states to exterior spiritual forces, and from the less to the more veridical' referring to Koonce, p. 978. Koonce considers all these as causes of dreams that can be physical, mental or spiritual. The term 'study' is not analysed. He mentions dreams together with 'ecstasies, or visions', 'if the mind is in harmony with God, the spirit sometimes [...] is instructed in truths pertaining to the present or future or one's own moral state.' However, he only refers to philosophers, *Chaucer and Fame*, pp. 46-9. Delany speaks of terminology, causes, and effects, and defines the Proem as a 'plethora of contradictory information about dreams', *Chaucer's House of Fame: the Poetics of Skeptical Fideism*, Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press, 1972, pp. 36, 41. J. S. Russell does not seem to deem the Proem highly, which is defined 'errant, quirky' and introduces a 'confused persona', p. 178.

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perfection as they have been identified in the previous chapters. Chaucer lists them following the ascensional degrees as identified by the mystics, and which resonates with the hierarchical degrees established by medieval philosophers – the authority in the field of gnoseology.

In order to illustrate this, a brief resumé of the previous chapters may be useful together with a detailed analysis of the sequence (ll. 25-51).<sup>179</sup> Chapter 1 has explored how dreams were included in a wide gamut of phenomena ranging from those merely physical and meaningless – ‘insomnium’ and ‘visum’ – up to the heights of visions, revelations, and prophecies, deemed as true knowledge. It was also remarked that true knowledge was believed to be yielded by divine grace and bestowed to a few chosen souls. This was theorised as occurring in three degrees identified as *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*. The analysis of the mystical experience (Chapter 2) has illustrated the ascending path to contemplation, illustrated by the ladder to perfection, which ranges from the first stages rooted in physicality that must be overcome, via contrition and repentance, up to the highest stage of contemplation and prophecy, accessible to only the few chosen.

When the introductory lines of *HF* are read in the light of the stages of the mystical experience, the degrees of knowledge established by authoritative philosophers, and the relative terms used, the opening section of *HF* discloses Chaucer’s knowledge of the conceptions of the time. Perhaps more importantly this process would confirm that medieval ‘dremes’ were considered within a wider spectre of states of consciousness. Therefore an analysis of dream terminology focussing exclusively on

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<sup>179</sup> Aware that punctuation depends on editing, here as in the whole of the thesis *Riverside* edition is followed. However, apart from the significance expressed by individual sentences, the sequence of terms in the order as mentioned by Chaucer echoes the underlying ladder-like structure as identified in the mystical writings.

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lines 1-11 would be incomplete. Reflecting upon this wider Chaucerian treatment may shed new light on the use of the term 'dreme' and on the narrative structure of the poem.

### Dream-lore and Oneiric Phenomena

After mentioning the different types of dreams constituting the medieval oneiric taxonomy, Chaucer proceeds to consider with the elements of physicality, the brain and its febleness:

For to gret febleness of her brayn,  
By abstynence or by sekness,  
Prison-stewe or gret destresse (ll. 24-26)

Abstinence can refer to food deprivation as well as purity of the body attained by avoidance of sexual intercourse.<sup>180</sup> Sickness is a pivotal stage in mystics' lives, a watershed separating their secular activity from the withdrawn life after the illness. It can be overcome by means of a visionary episode which leads the secular person towards withdrawal from the world to a contemplative life – characterised by isolation. For anchorites it literally means living in a limited enclosed space. Can this be what Chaucer refers to as 'prison-stewe' (l. 26)?<sup>181</sup> Distress would designate the feeling of hardship and anxiety experienced whilst still in the first stages of the path to perfection.

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<sup>180</sup> Chaucer also uses 'abstinence' in *The Summoner's Tale*, together with 'poverté' (Summ.T, l. 1873); three times it is employed in a context of fasting (l. 1879; 1883; 1893). It is accompanied by 'preye and wake' (l. 1900), by 'charite, humblesse' (l. 1908), and rhyming with 'continence' (l. 1907). The Summoner's awareness and overlooking of the abstinent aspects of contemplative life render much of the irony of the tale.

<sup>181</sup> For the comparison of 'prison-stewe' to 'prison-stie' meaning 'prison enclosure', see *Riverside*, p. 978, n. 26, see also *MED*, 'prisoun'. 'Steu(e)' (n. 2) 1. (c) has the meaning of 'a small room, closet'. This expression (although with different spellings) is interpreted as 'a small room' in *TC* (3.601, 698), *MED*, 1. c. N. Havely renders it as 'confinement', *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 127. For the use and the function of 'stewe' in *TC* see below ch. 4, pp. 163.

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Lines 29-35 proceed on the ascending path, pointing to the stages after abstinence and illness:

That som man is to curious  
In studye, or melancolyous,  
Or thus so inly ful of drede  
That no man may hym bote bede;  
Or elles that devocion  
Of somme, and contemplacion  
Causeth suche dremes ofte (ll. 29-35)

In these lines ‘studye’, ‘devocion’, and ‘contemplacion’ are closely connected to the mystical discourse. In addition to referring to the act of studying, ‘studye’ also conveys the meaning of a mental state of a particular intensity: ‘a state of deep thought, meditation, contemplation.’<sup>182</sup> ‘Studie’ renders the French ‘cogitaciun’ in a context concerning dreams.<sup>183</sup> *Cogitatio* is the first stage towards *contemplatio* (see ch. 1, p. 43). The second stage through which to access contemplation was identified in *meditatio*. ‘Devocion’ is ‘the profound religious emotion of awe, reverence, adoration’ that imbues the whole mystical experience in all the stages.<sup>184</sup> ‘Contemplation causeth much dremes ofte’ (l. 34-5). How can contemplation cause dreams? Mystics refer to it as ‘a kind of sleep’, and ‘a kind of slumber’ (Margery), and that they kept their awareness during their visions (Hildegard). Contemplation is the highest stage attainable by the human soul, a state of more profound awareness and knowledge than the ordinary consciousness. Therefore Chaucer does not refer to ‘dreams’ but rather to ‘drem’, oneiric phenomena experienced in a wider state of consciousness,

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<sup>182</sup> MED, ‘studi(e) (n.), 4 (b). ‘Studie’ is also the state in which Arcite falls after singing a roundel in the forest in the Knight’s Tale ll. 1528-30. As to the qualification ‘melancolyous’ – of the four humours this is the one that characterises poets, artists and lovers. It could be relevant to remind the character of Lady Study in Langland’s *Piers the Ploughman*, who is introduced after Thought and before Imagination.

<sup>183</sup> MED, *ibid.*, a1400(c1303) Mannyng HS (Hrl 1701) 399: Sum [dreams] come þurgh grete stody [F cogitaciun] <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/medidx?type=id&id=MED43437&egs=all&egdisplay=open>> [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009]

<sup>184</sup> MED, ‘devocioun’ (n.), 1. Devocioun also has the meaning ‘devoutness, piety’ that refers to non-contemplative people who are devout to a saint or to a figure of particular sanctity. In *The Knight’s Tale*, devotion is offered to Mars (l. 2371).

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in the beyond, during which contemplative phenomena occur.<sup>185</sup> From this perspective, the mention of 'drede' (l. 31) could be explained as the sacred awe that is believed to be the origin of the concept of divine (see ch. 2, pp. 69, 100).<sup>186</sup>

After reference to contemplation, in lines 36-40 Chaucer moves on to lovers.<sup>187</sup>

Or that the cruel lyf unsofte  
Which these *ilke* lovers leden  
That hopen over-much or dreden,  
That purely her impressions  
Causeth hem avisions (ll. 36-40. Emphasis added)

At this stage lovers have been interpreted as earthly lovers. However, one could wonder why Chaucer would move from contemplation to worldly love. Further how can 'ilke' be justified here? It has been remarked that 'avisions' (l. 40) is employed with a different sense from l. 7.<sup>188</sup> If the expression 'these same lovers' refers to the mystics, then Chaucer is pointing to the lovers of the divine. Then 'avisions' (l. 40) would maintain the religious significance. Similarly 'drede' (ll. 31; 38) could express the same kind of terror and awe experienced in front of the sacred (see ch. 2, pp. 69).

In lines 41-2 'spirits' causing people's dream at night recall that all phenomena could be triggered by good or evil spirits. No one is immune from their influence, neither 'folk' (l. 42) nor mystics. Unlike mystics, secular people cannot differentiate between dreams caused by good or evil spirits as they lack the taste of divinity (see ch. 1, p.

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<sup>185</sup> From the date chart of *OED* it appears that after *Ancrene Riwe* and Richard Rolle, Chaucer is the first to use 'contemplation' with the meaning of 'Religious musing, devout meditation.' The *OED* also notes that it is 'the earliest sense; very common down to 17th c.', 'contemplation', 3.

<sup>186</sup> Koonce does not notice the allusion to the way to perfection. He explains 'drede' as the effect of disharmony caused 'when the mind forgetful of God, subjects itself to things of the world or of the flesh, or is otherwise guilty of spiritual sloth', p. 48.

<sup>187</sup> *Riverside* refers to Dido as the example of lover obsessed by the *insomnium*, p. 978, n. 36-40. Although the terminology of secular and mystical love overlap, here the lovers referred to are not the earthly lovers.

<sup>188</sup> Havely renders 'visions' (l. 7) as 'precognitive dream', p. 126, whereas the same term in l. 40 as 'the kind of dreams that [...] reflect[s] the preoccupations of waking life', *Chaucer's Dream Poems*, p. 127, n. 39-40.

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18).<sup>189</sup> Having attained higher degrees of the spiritual experience does not imply that the individual is immune to the action of the devil and of evil spirits. Lines 43-51 illustrate the highest stage of the ascent, and deploy a gamut of biblical terms, though without defining the phenomenon by a specific term:

Or yf the soule of propre kynde  
Be so parfit, as men fynde,  
That yt forwot that ys to come,  
And that hyt warneth alle and some  
Of everych of her aventures  
Be avisions or be figures,  
But that oure flesshe ne hath no myght  
To understonde hyt aryght,  
For hyt is warned to derkly (ll. 43-51)

Having achieved perfection (l. 44), the soul foreknows and warns the future. Knowledge is wrapped in the mystical veil, or cloud, to employ mystical images. At first it would appear that Chaucer refers to prophecy (ll. 45-6; see ch. 1, p. 38). Visions and figures point to the highest stage of contemplation that can be experienced by few chosen souls. Nonetheless the visions at this stage remains ineffable, because it is too 'derkly' (l. 51).<sup>190</sup> This last term is charged with the significance bestowed to it by *Corinthians* I, 13.<sup>191</sup>

To conclude: so far the introductory section of the *HF* has been deemed a debate on the causes of dreams. However, at a close analysis it echoes the mystical discourse of

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<sup>189</sup> Mystics too are exposed to the ever present danger of evil, as Julian and Margery witness themselves. Even at the last stages of her spiritual vision Julian is tempted by the devil. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, chapters 66, 69. Margery experiences foul visions when God withdraws his visions, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 59.

<sup>190</sup> *Riverside* hypothesises a reference to Macrobius's *somnium* which need interpretation in order to be understood, p. 978, n.48. Koonce interprets bodily love, p. 49.

<sup>191</sup> 'Derkly' is not the only term in *HF* that could be related to this writing of St Paul's. The prophet illustrates the relevance of charity: although he commences by mentioning prophecy (13:2), he maintains that the most important and greatest quality is charity (13:13). In the light of this it is worth noting that charity is mentioned (l. 108) in *HF* at the very end of the introductory section. More specifically it is located after the invocation to God as infinite mover, and before starting the narration of the dream. Both terms mark the end of a section: 'derkly' ends the review of the ascending journey of the soul (1-58); whereas 'charité' concludes the introduction before the very narration of the dream (lines 1-108).



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the journey of the soul towards contemplation and ecstasy. It resonates with the ladder of perfection constituted by the lower rungs of practice aimed to control the body and thoughts to contemplation and prophecy. Further it anticipates the dreamer's path, as is narrated in the rest of the poem.

#### Invocation to the God of Sleep (ll. 59-80)

Why does the poet introduce an invocation with 'devocion' (l. 68) to Morpheus? In *BD* the narrator suffers from sleeplessness, whereas here the dream has already been dreamt.

And to this god that I of rede  
Prey I that he wol me spede  
My sweven for to telle aryght,  
Yf every drem stonde in his myght. (ll. 77-80)

The invocation to Morpheus acquires new significance within the discourse of figurative imagery of sleep and dream, as illustrated above (see p. 160). Morpheus, representing sleep, indicates the mental quiet leading to the transitional state of poetry composition. 'Sweven' (l. 79), what the narrator has already dreamt, coincides with the content of the poem. Therefore the invocation reinforces the correspondence between sleep and 'drem', and poetic trance. The oneiric image is not only literally intended as one defining the type of dream, whether an oracle, a *visio*, or a *somnium*, but rather it indicates the mental journey from ordinary consciousness to creation. 'Drem' is employed referring to the whole range of oneiric phenomena, whereas 'sweven' indicates more specifically the dream vision, the result of the poet's creative state.

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Similarities between the mystics' journey towards the divine and the poet's oneiric progress can be identified in the following Books. The dreamer's gradual ascent is signposted by oneiric imagery shared by mystics and poets. After the narration of *The Aeneid* the dreamer expresses his intention of leaving the temple. His desire to leave it is illustrated by the image of the door: 'wiket' (l. 477); and 'dores' (l. 480). From a space where a literary vision has already been dreamt (*The Aeneid*), the dreamer crosses the door into a desert-like landscape where he is alone. Figuratively it could symbolise the aridity, the emptiness of the beginning of a new poetic 'drem', literary work, still to be composed: the dreamer's own.<sup>192</sup> At this desolate sight, he bursts into an invocation to Christ asking him to defend him from 'fantome and illusion' (l. 493). This sounds a genuine prayer addressed to the divinity 'with devocion' (l. 494) seeking defence from evil spirits and demons. This is reinforced by the dreamer casting his 'eyen to the hevene' (l. 495) which expresses the strength of the prayer addressed to heaven. The shift through the door to the desert, and the dreamer's feeling of unsettlement and uncertainty cause his prayer. Compared to a poetic invocation to a god, after his intensely concentrated prayer the dreamer sees the eagle soaring in the sky. As in *BD* the narrator's prayer originates the following action.

The whole of Book I illustrates different stages of mental concentration. The initial narration of *The Aeneid* could point to the stage of 'studye', intended as both modern English 'studying', and Middle English 'studye' corresponding to the state of 'cogitatio' (see p. 126). The dreamer then moves on through the door, a symbol of transition between states (see ch. 2), and the unsettling sensation of being lost. The

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<sup>192</sup> Delany remarks that the desert is an unusual image in dream visions, as their conventional landscape is constituted by gardens, *Chaucer's House of Fame*, p. 58. J. Lawlor notices that the desert is introduced when the audience would expect the appearance of the animal guiding the dreamer, 'The Earlier Poems', p. 46. H. Patch interprets the desert as the 'despair of the lover', 'Chaucer's Desert', *Modern Language Notes*, 34 (1919), 321-28, p. 328. J. Steadman relates the sand of Lybia to Jove, 'Chaucer's "Desert of Libye," Venus, and Jove (*The Hous of Fame*, 486-87)', *Modern Language Notes*, 76 (1961) 196-201, pp. 196 ff.

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internal prayer represents a subsequent stage, apparently characterised by 'thinking', which, as has been seen, corresponds to the deeper state of 'meditatio' which leads to the appearance of the eagle, a symbol often employed in mystical and visionary writing (see p. 108).

## Book II

While the eagle is soaring in the sky the narrator emerges to the fore once more to declare that his 'avisoun' is so marvellous that not even the most popular dreamers of antiquity, Scipio, Nabugodonosor, Pharaao – had ever dreamed anything alike. Then the narration moves on to the golden feathered eagle which swoops the dreamer away.<sup>193</sup>

Critics agree on tracing back Chaucer's eagle to Dante's. Dante's falling asleep in the grass in the early hours of the day<sup>194</sup> is a remembrance of the dream poetry tradition. Here in contrast the dreamer is in the desert when the eagle grasps him in its talons. The desert as opposed to Dante's grass could point to the view Chaucer has of himself as a poet at the time of writing *HF*: not yet in the garden tradition of acknowledged poetry. When the dreamer soars up, his positive powers are silenced.

For so astonyed and asweved  
Was every vertu in my heved,  
What with his sours and with my drede,  
That al my felynge gan to dede,  
For-ghi hit was to gret affray. (ll. 549-53)

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<sup>193</sup> Dante dreams that a big golden feathered eagle takes him up to the circle of the fire. When he awakes he is so frightened that he feels as if he is on the point of almost dying, 'ismorto', *Purg.*, IX, l. 41. Virgil explains that while Dante was asleep Lucia appeared, who took him up in front of the gate of Purgatory. Unlike that which occurs in *Purgatory*, ix, 13-33, the flight in *HF* occupies the whole of Bk II. Instance of the employment of the eagle are in Boethius, *Cons.*, IV, met. 1, ll. 1-6; Ovid, *Met.* X, ll. 155-61. On the Eagle see also John M. Steadman, 'Chaucer's Eagle: A Contemplative Symbol', *PMLA*, 75 (1960) 153-159. J.A.W. Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame. An Exposition of The House of Fame*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, pp. 50-1.

<sup>194</sup> For the importance of the time in which dreams occur, see p. 38. See also C. Speroni, 'Dante's Prophetic Morning-Dreams', *Studies in Philology*, 45, (1948) 50-59.

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The loss of consciousness is expressed by 'astonyed'<sup>195</sup> and 'asweved'.<sup>196</sup> The evidence that the dreamer has lost consciousness is twofold: the eagle commands him to 'awake' (l. 556; 560);<sup>197</sup> secondly the dreamer specifies '[m]y mynde cam to me ageyn' (l. 564).

The dreamer's flight proceeds with a gradual ascending movement. Within Book II four ascents can be identified, including the one when the dreamer is first grasped. The second ascent is marked by 'upper to sore / he gan' (ll. 885-6), followed by an oath by St James.<sup>198</sup> From this height the dreamer can still recognise the earth landscape. But soon after the eagle soars still upward and his view becomes wider, he 'was flowen fro the ground so hye' (l. 905) that the earth becomes as small as a dot, 'no more semed than a prikke' (l. 907).<sup>199</sup> Now as the eagle explains they are flying higher than Alexander the Great, Scipio, Dedalus, and Icarus (ll. 910-20). At this third ascent the eagle invites the dreamer to turn his face upwards (l. 925) to behold the sphere of the air. It also warns him not to be afraid of the 'citezeyn' (l. 930) of this sphere, the 'eyryssh bestes' of which Plato speaks (ll. 931-2), that is to say the demons inhabiting the air.<sup>200</sup> If the dreamer 'cast up' (l. 935) his eyes he can see as far as the Galaxy (l. 936). The perspective has definitely shifted from the earth to the infinite of the cosmos; from microcosm to macrocosm.

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<sup>195</sup> Referred to the senses or mental faculties it signifies: 'dulled, benumbed, deadened'; whereas referred to persons it means 'stupefied, stunned; unconscious', *MED*, 'astoned', 4, a; and 1.

<sup>196</sup> 'Asweved' signifies 'put to sleep, dulled'; *MED*, 'asweved'.

<sup>197</sup> See also *BD*, ll. 179; 181; 183; 202; above pp. 163, 160 and for the expression 'awake', see *TC*, I, 730, and p. 163.

<sup>198</sup> Havely remarks that this oath is relevant in the context, the pilgrimage to St James's being one of the major ones, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 161, n. 885.

<sup>199</sup> The single point is also a mystical symbol. In her third revelation Julian maintains: 'And after this I saw God in a poynte', XI, l. 427 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/Teams/julianfr.htm>>. 'I saw the whole Godhead concentrated as it were a single point', Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. C. Walters, London, Penguin, 1966, p. 80. This symbol represents the centrality of divinity, its immateriality, and its immeasurability, see *ibid.*, note p. 80. See also *PF*, l. 64, 'syn erthe was so lyte'.

<sup>200</sup> Lewis, *Discarded Image*, p. 2. See also Erickson, ch. 1.

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The fourth and last ascending stage of the Book makes the dreamer extremely joyful.

He gan always upper to sore,  
And gladded me ay more and more,  
So feythfully to me spak he. (ll. 961-3)

Further to 'to entertain, amuse',<sup>201</sup> 'gladen' denotes comfort achieved in spiritual circumstances.<sup>202</sup> To testify the height achieved the dreamer can see the demons of the air beneath him together with clouds, mists, storms, rain, winds and 'th'engendrynge in hir kyndes' (l. 968). The view reminds him of two noble antecedents: Boethius and St Paul. The image drawn upon Boethius is the simile of Philosophy clothed with wings that enables her to soar in the sky.<sup>203</sup>

And thoo thoughte y upon Boece,  
That writ, "A thought may flee so hye  
Wyth fetheres of Philosophye,  
To passen everych element,  
And whan he hath so fer ywent,  
Than may be seen behynde hys bak  
Cloude" – and al that y of spak. (972-78)

In a moment of perplexity the dreamer wonders whether he is there 'in body or in gost' (l. 981). He does not know, but God does, echoing St Paul. Recent criticism has been inclined to interpret this poem less allegorically than in the past and to focus on the aspect of parody.<sup>204</sup> Nonetheless in the light of the ascent, the feeling of 'gladness', indicating a blissful state, and both spiritual literary references it is open to different interpretations.<sup>205</sup> One could wonder whether recalling Boethius represents the poet's acknowledgment of himself in the act of poetic creation whilst performing

<sup>201</sup> MED, 'gladen', 2, a. The expression 'glading tale' defines an entertaining story.

<sup>202</sup> 'To gladden (persons or creatures); make joyful, fill with joy or bliss', MED, 'gladen', 1a; and 'to cheer or comfort (the heart, soul, spirits, etc.)', MED, 'gladen', 1b, (a).

<sup>203</sup> 'Sunt etenim pennae volucres mihi, Quae celsa conscendat poli', Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae*, IV, met. 1., ed. O. Dallera, Milano, Bompiani, 1975, p. 268.

<sup>204</sup> Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame*; whereas Koonce, *Chaucer and Fame*, maintains an allegorical interpretation. P. Boitani interprets the reference to St Paul as a possibility Chaucer has, he is 'tempted by mysticism', but then he does not choose it, see *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame*, Cambridge, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 1984, pp. 197-8.

<sup>205</sup> Considering the blissfulness achieved at this stage of the dreamer's journey does not imply dismissing the parody and the comic elements that Chaucer spreads all along the poem.

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it? Does the dreamer finally conceive himself as a poet? Further one could argue whether locating St Paul, Boethius, and himself side by side points both to acknowledge the extra-ordinary powers shared by mystics, philosophers, and poets, and to join the discourse on poetry and theology (see pp. 155). The eagle interrupts the dreamer's thoughts, inviting him to leave behind his 'fantasye' (l. 991). The eagle's words could represent a warning to continue his present 'avysion', his poetry composition, rather than being distracted by thoughts on how to compose poetry, creating literature as opposed to meta-literature/criticism. At the end of the flight the poet has to proceed on his feet by climbing painfully towards things to learn.

### Book III

The invocation opening the third Book echoes Dante's invocation to Apollo, god of 'science and lyght' (l. 1091). The poet asks to make his book agreeable (l. 1097), to give it sense, 'sentence' (l. 1100), and for inspiration, 'Now entre in my breste anon!' (l. 1109). This is what was believed in antiquity that occurred when the Sybill prophesised, by uttering her oracles through Apollo's inspiration, 'breathing in'. It also recalls the mystics' expressing their being an instrument through which the divinity blows his word (see ch. 2, p. 130).

The dreamer wishes to approach the House of Fame which stands 'upon so hygh a roche' (l. 1116) and starts the climb that 'greved' (l. 1119) 'with alle payne' (l. 1118) 'up the hil' (l. 1165). The climb marks one more ascending stage, and at the end the dreamer is stupefied. The beauty of the castle is so wonderful '[t]hat it astonyeth yit my thought, [a]nd maketh al my wyt to swynke' (ll. 1174-5). The sight is so wonderful that he has no skills to describe it, '[m]y wit ne may me suffise' (l. 1179). Soon the

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dreamer faces a further gate and a higher stage. The dreamer relates all the various kinds of music he hears (ll. 1193-1281). Although music is heard both outside and inside the house, heavenly music, 'hevenyssh melodye' (l. 1395) sung around Fame's throne can be heard after crossing the threshold. The gate made of gold is 'a further reminder that the castle [...] is 'out of this world'.<sup>206</sup> It recalls Rolle's hearing blissful music at the higher stages of mystical experience (see ch. 2, p. 92). Indeed the music heard is defined so harmonious that it made the whole palace resound and the dreamer invokes the Lord.

And Lord, the hevenyssh melodye  
Of songes ful of armonye  
I herde aboute her trone ysonge,  
That al the paleys-walles ronge (ll. 1395-8)

Given the abundance of mystical imagery it is of no surprise that among the supplicants the fifth group does not wish to be yielded fame as they acted for the sake of 'contemplacioun And Goddes love' (ll. 1710-11).

The image of the whirling house is probably the most fascinating and thought-provoking challenge the dreamer offers. He expresses his wish to learn some more to the eagle perched on top of a high rock – not at all fearful now. After having uttered an oath of St Peter,<sup>207</sup> the eagle explains that the dreamer cannot enter the house without its help:

That but I bringe the therinne,  
Ne shalt thou never kunne gynne  
To come into hyt, out of doute,  
So faste hit whirleth, lo, aboute (ll. 2003-6)

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<sup>206</sup> Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, pp. 125. Although he parallels Fame's castle with Pluto's palace in *Sir Orfeo*, Bennett does not proceed along the reflection concerning the other world. According to Bennett, as this poem deals with sound and its transmission, it is not surprising to find minstrels and other people whose profession relates with sound and narrating stories, pp. 121-2. He underlines that the heavenly music heard within the castle stresses the gap between the two goddesses described in the poem: Venus and Fame, p. 135.

<sup>207</sup> Havely remarks the appropriateness of this oath here, as Peter is the keeper of the gate of Heaven, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 207.

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Parallels between this house and Ovid's have been drawn, particularly on the base of the countless openings.<sup>208</sup> Whirling houses are present in romances, and entering them requires the presence of a guide, which is usually an animal.<sup>209</sup> The house of Rumour is extremely significant within the analysis of transitional states of consciousness as it represents the other world. '[T]he other world can be regarded either as itself a revolving castle or city, or as a castle provided with a perpetually closing or revolving door.'<sup>210</sup> The whole revolving structure recalls and would have a similar function to the clashing rocks of Greek mythology, the Symplegades. The hero has to pass through these doors in a flash, as they move amazingly fast.<sup>211</sup> The moment of transition is usually described as the time of the winking of an eyelid. If the whirling house belongs to the same tradition this could explain why the dreamer could not enter without the eagle's supernatural help.<sup>212</sup> From the perspective of poetic creation entering this house represents a transition into the highest state of ecstasy.

This analysis demonstrates how the mystical intertext imbues the *HF* both in the Proem and in the rest of the poem. The Proem provides a ladder of transitional states including the stages concerning practice aiming to control the body up to the

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<sup>208</sup> Ovid, *Metam.*, 12, 39-63.

<sup>209</sup> See W. O. Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame*, New York, Haskell House, 1965 [1907], pp. 144-51, 173-81 on revolving houses, and p. 86 on the eagle as a guiding animal. According to V. Propp, in folk-lore the revolving house is one of the aspects characterising the person living in the forest, often a hag, the Baba Yaga, see V. Propp, *Morfologia della fiaba*, Torino, Einaudi, 1988 [1966], p. 94.

<sup>210</sup> A.K., Coomaraswamy 'Symplegades', in Montagu M.F. Ashley ed., *Studies and Essays in the History of Science and Learning offered in Homage to George Sarton on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday, 31 August 1944*, New York, Henry Schuman, pp. 463-88, p. 480. See also R. McTurk, *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic World*, Aldershot; Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2005, pp. 29 ff. McTurk maintains that the House of Rumour should be considered as an example of representation of the other world.

<sup>211</sup> Coomaraswamy, 'Symplegades', p. 481. See also section on PF, p. 163.

<sup>212</sup> Bennett briefly mentions the supernatural aspect of the whirling house and refers to two examples: *Fled Bricrend* and *Arthur of Little Britain*. Soon after he associates this to the 'less arcane' movement of the wheel of Fortune, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, pp. 169-70.



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highest states of contemplation and prophecy. The sense of ascent is consistent throughout the work in Book I from the crossing of the first gate; the solitude of the desert; the dreamer's flight. In Book II the whole flight up to the House of Fame is performed in steady ascending movement made up of four substages. Finally the dreamer climbs painfully, crosses a further gate made of gold, he can hear heavenly music and eventually he can enter the whirling house, the world of the beyond, with the eagles' help.

The interruption before the Man of Auctoritee can be paralleled to the final cloud surrounding the object of the quest, be it mystical or literary. The poet's silence translates materially the sense of ineffability. The non-existence of the Man of Auctoritee's words, the poet's silence, correspond to the unutterable feeling sensed by the mystics.

Facing the complexity of this poem rather than drawing conclusions, one could consider the questions arising from the analysis. Is *HF* a step towards Chaucer's awareness of his poetic activity? Bennett maintains that Chaucer 'is the first Englishman to share Dante's sense of the worth of poetry and of the act of poetic creation'.<sup>213</sup> Some precise instances in *HF* would confirm this. During the narration of *The Aeneid* the verb 'saw' is applied to Aeneas during his journey into the other world accompanied by the Sybil ('saugh he' l. 446), and to the poet's vision. However, the expression 'me mette' (l. 313) is employed<sup>214</sup> precisely when the poet states his independence as a teller. Indeed no other poet has ever narrated *The Aeneid* as he has. With these words Chaucer maintains his independence and that of his

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<sup>213</sup> Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, p. 101.

<sup>214</sup> Havely maintains that here 'mete' 'takes the place of phrases like 'saught I grave', *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 138, n. 313. However, it may be more than a simple stylistic avoidance of a repeated expression, see below *PF*, p. 163 n. 232.

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dream – from any authors.<sup>215</sup> Although the verb ‘me mette’ has an impersonal structure, here it expresses the dreamer’s will and activity of independent creation.

The voices arriving at the House of Fame become like the persons who uttered the words on the earth (ll. 1076-7). Can this signify that every ‘speech’, every word is unique? Consequently every author is unique in their individual manner of narration even though of an old story? This could be related to Chaucer’s statement that no one has narrated *The Aeneid* as he has done. Finally the difference between the dreamer’s ‘vision’ and the ‘fantaysie’ defined by the eagle, as between poetry and the reflection upon poetry – can this be a further awareness of Chaucer as a poet? In *PF* the narrator-dreamer is introduced definitely as a poet.<sup>216</sup> Respecting the silence in front of the Man of Authority, these questions remain open to debate and research.<sup>217</sup> But it must be relevant that the underlying narrative pattern of *HF* parallels the mystics’ ascending journey to ecstasy. Despite its incompleteness, the dreamer’s progress overarches all the stages from physical control of the body to the encounter with the object of his quest, including the ineffability at the ultimate stage: the poet’s silence. In this perspective one could argue whether the poem is really unfinished.

#### 3.6. *The Parliament of Fowls*

Criticism agrees that in *PF* Chaucer sets up the context of the dream deriving from daily thoughts and prepares the readers for the narration of the dream. However, it

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<sup>215</sup> Havely emphasises that this is the only use of the term ‘auctor’ in *HF*, *Chaucer’s Dream Poetry*, p. 138, n. 314.

<sup>216</sup> Knight, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 24. In *PF* the dreamer is not only an observer but an artist.

<sup>217</sup> Delany’s interpretation of the conclusion is surprising: ‘Whatever the identity of the anonymous figure, his message, had it been delivered, could only have intensified an already existing structural paradox. Chaucer has amply demonstrated the unreliability or ambivalence of traditional statements [...]’, *Chaucer’s ‘House of Fame’*, p. 108. The possibility of a palinode or a kind of retraction as in later works is excluded.

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will be seen that the relationship between the poet's daily reading and the 'drem' goes beyond the quality of the *insomnium*, and not only because of African's appearance as an apparition. The influence from Claudianus may go beyond the stanza listing the dreamers, and a detailed examination of the poem foregrounds the relation between 'drem' and transitional states of consciousness.

The tendency to deem *PF* as mainly an *insomnium* originates from the lines derived from Claudianus:<sup>218</sup>

The wery hunttere, slepyng in his bed,  
To wode ayein his mynde goth anon;  
The jüge dremeth how his plees been sped;  
The cartere dremeth how his cart is gon;  
The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;  
The syke met he drynketh of the tonne;  
The lovere met he hath his lady wonne. (ll. 99-105)

This stanza recalls the connection between the activity of the mind during the day and in sleep, the result of which is a dream originated from the anxiety of the mind. Macrobius identifies it as *insomnium*,<sup>219</sup> and shows how this dream affects the lover, rich people concerned about material possessions which they wish to achieve or fear to lose, and those who undergo abundance of food, or fasting. These concerns are only valid during the sleep and vanish with it.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Curry maintains that *PF* is a *somnium animale* and that it is also partly a *somnium coeleste* because of African's apparition, p. 235. According to Lawlor it is an *insomnium* unlikely *Somnium Scipionis* that is an *oraculum*, 'The Earlier Poems', p. 53. Spearing identifies elements of both *somnium coeleste* and *animale*, and of an *oraculum*, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 92. J. A. W. Bennett remarks that if African's apparition was a fruit of the daily labour, then the poet's dream would not be worth interpreting. Therefore Chaucer is cautious not to invalidate his dream, although African's role is minimum, *The Parlement of Foules. An Interpretation*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, pp. 53-4.

<sup>219</sup> 'Est enim enupnion quotiens cura oppressi animi corporisue siue fortunae, qualis uigilantem fatigauerat, talem se ingerit dormienti', Macrobius, *Commento al sogno di Scipione*, ed. M. Neri, Bompiani, Milano, 2007, 1.3, p. 246. See also Part I, p. 5.

<sup>220</sup> 'Haec et his similia, quoniam ex habitu mentis quietem sicut praeuenerant ita et turbauerant dormientis, una cum somno auolant et pariter euanescunt' [Since they originate from a state of mind that preceded and troubled the dreamer's rest, this and similar (phenomena) to this disappear with sleep and vanish with it], Macrobius, 1. 3, p. 248.

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As is generally acknowledged, Macrobius's classification is widely known in the Middle Ages and his voice is echoed in the works of a number of authors.<sup>221</sup> In Boccaccio's *De genealogia deorum* Macrobius's five kinds of dreams are recalled, though slightly modified. The *insomnium*, Boccaccio maintains, is caused by the thoughts mulled over during the day, 'a premeditatione causatum'. The poet adds a short list of dreamers who experience an *insomnium*, and also refers to the abundance or lack of food as possible alternative causes.<sup>222</sup> He agrees that these dreams 'disappear into thin air like sleep itself'.<sup>223</sup> A similar view appears in Bartholomaeus Anglicus, who acknowledges that dreams can originate from 'appetite, affeccion, and desire'.<sup>224</sup> The lack of food and drinking are among the causes of dreams as well as the constant thoughts of something desired. For instance 'the coueitous man alwey metip of gold' and of counting his money.<sup>225</sup>

### Claudianus as a Source

Criticism has acknowledged the close similarity of the fifteenth stanza of *PF* and the opening lines of Claudianus's *De VI consulato honorii* (in particular lines 3-7). Pratt demonstrated that the passage can also be found in *Liber Catonianus*, a medieval

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<sup>221</sup> Bennett explains that Macrobius was considered as a 'veritable cyclopedia of philosophy, natural and moral', and that he was considered amongst the *veteres*, Bennett, *Parlement of Foules*, p. 31.

<sup>222</sup> 'In hac igitur specie somnii amans dilectam sibi puellam in amplexus eius occurrentem aspiciet, aut fugientem miserrimus exorabit. Nauta tranquillum mare navemque pansis velis sulcantem, aut tempestate periclitantem aspiciet. Sic et agricola frustra letabitur letas arvis intuens segetes, depastasque plorabit. Ingurgitator pocula exhaustiet; ieiunus cibos aut optabit, aut faucibus vacuis devorabit appositos' [In this kind of dream the lover sees his beloved going into his embrace, or very sad he will beseech her who runs away. The sailor sees the calm sea and the ship sailing with swollen sails, or sees the danger of the tempest. The farmer will be happy looking at the fields full of pastures, or cries the ruined ones. The one who is greedy consumes food, the one who is hungry desires food, or due to his empty stomach devours the food placed before him], Boccaccio, *De genealogia deorum*, 1.3 <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [accessed 27<sup>th</sup> February 2010].

<sup>223</sup> 'una cum somno in auras evanescunt', Boccaccio *Genealogia*, 1. 3 <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [accessed 27<sup>th</sup> February 2010].

<sup>224</sup> *On the Properties of Things*, John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus *De proprietatibus rerum*. A critical text, vol. 2, M. C. Seymour ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, pp. 337-8.

<sup>225</sup> *On the Properties of Things*, p. 338.

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schoolbook<sup>226</sup> and that Chaucer knew this passage as part of *De raptu Proserpinae* rather than as the Preface to *De VI consulatu honorii*.<sup>227</sup> However, what is relevant is the fact that Chaucer was aware of the entire Preface. Moreover an analysis of the two texts can demonstrate that there are similarities that have been overlooked by criticism. In addition to rendering into Middle English the list of dreamers offered by the Latin text, Chaucer follows Claudianus in treating the dream emerging from daily worries in a new manner, providing it with what could be defined as a transitional state of consciousness. It is therefore appropriate to linger briefly on Claudianus's text before analysing the *PF* in its entirety.

Claudianus's opening statement illustrates how the mind, in the quiet of sleep, returns to the worries that have weighed whilst awake.<sup>228</sup> At the end of these lines, the Latin poet turns to himself: 'me quoque Musarum studium sub nocte silenti / Artibus assuetis sollicitare solet' (ll. 11-12).<sup>229</sup> Claudianus illustrates how he saw

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<sup>226</sup> Pratt, 'Chaucer's Claudian', *Speculum*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1947) 419-429.

<sup>227</sup> Pratt, 'Chaucer's Claudian', p. 422.

<sup>228</sup> Omnia que sensu voluntur vota diurno, 1  
pectore sopito reddit amica quies.  
venator cum membra thoro defessa reponit,  
mens tamen ad silvas et sua lustra redit.  
iudicibus lites, aurige sompnia currus 5  
vanaque nocturnis meta cavetur equis.  
furto gaudet amans, permutat navita merces,  
et vigil elapsas querit avarus opes.  
blanda que largitur frustra sicientibus egris  
irriguus gelido pocula fonte sopor. 10  
me quoque Musarum studium sub nocte silenti  
artibus assuetis sollicitare solet. [...]

[All things that with waking sense desire ponders kindly repose brings back to the slumbering mind. The huntsman stretches his weary limbs upon the couch, yet his mind ever returns to the woods where his quarry lurks. The judge dreams of law-suits, the charioteer of his chariot the nightly steeds of which he guides past a shadowy turning-point. The lover repeats love's mysteries, the merchant makes exchange of goods, the miser still watchfully grasps at elusive riches, and to thirsty sufferers all-pervading sleep offers from a cooling spring idly alluring draughts] *Claudian with an English translation*, ed. M. Platnauer, London, Heinemann, New York, 1922, vol. II, p. 71.

<sup>229</sup> 'In the silent night the study of the Muses usually urges me too by the familiar arts.' Platnauer's translation reads: 'I am a lover of the Muses and in the silent night I too am haunted by that my accustomed task', Platnauer ed., p. 71. This translation appears to overlook the activity of 'studium' that can also be interpreted as the first stage of mental attention: 'cogitatio', see p. 126. Moreover, the choice 'haunted' to render Latin 'sollicitare' provides the poet's experience an aura of 'incubus' that is totally lacking in the original: the magnificent dream the poet has being evidence for this.

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himself in the sky, laying his verses at Jove's feet, and how in his propitious sleep, 'favet sompnus' (l. 15), the gods gave applause to his words. The poet was not alone: his poems were with him. He concludes that his dream did not come from the ivory gate: it was not false (referring to the two gates from which dreams originate according to the classical tradition). Evidence of this truth is the fact that he stands before an assembly as noble as that in heaven. Claudianus as a poet undergoes the same process as the other dreamers: his poetic concerns of daily life accompany him during his sleep. However, his oneiric experience turns out to be unique: as a poet he stands among the gods on high in the heavenly vault holding his poems. The poet signposts a gap between the ordinary people's concerns listed in the opening lines as opposed to the poetical experience which may lead to divine heights. Moreover he parallels what occurs in his dream to circumstances in his waking life: as he was among gods during the propitious sleep which yielded him a true dream, he is now among such a noble assembly chaired by his patron.

Like Claudianus, the narrating voice in *PF* shifts to the personal 'I', after listing instances of *insomnium*. The poetic persona cannot state whether his dream derives from reading African. However he recollects the apparition's words: African will reward his work:<sup>230</sup>

Can I not seyn, if that the cause were  
For I hadde red of Affrican byform  
That made me to mete that he stod there  
But thus seyde he, 'thow hast the so wel born  
In lokynge of myn olde book totorn,  
Of which Macrobye roughte nat a lyte,  
That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte!' (*PF* ll. 106-12)

African's apparition confers a shift of significance of the poet's dream. Even though the readers might expect it to be an *insomnium*, they soon find out that this is not the

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<sup>230</sup> Bennett notices that 'quyte' is employed also in *HF* ll. 669-70, *Parlement of Foules*, p. 55.

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case for two main reasons. The first pertains to the dream content. The daily concerns follow the poet also at night in his sleep and yet his dreaming relates to knowledge. There seems to exist a divide between anxiety due to desires for material matters, as opposed to the poet's more intellectual and dignifying desire for knowledge. The second reason why this is not an *insomnium* is that Scipio's appearance yields it the gravity of the *oraculum*. By making his dreamer follow Scipio through a heavenly journey, Chaucer expands the concept of ordinary *insomnium*, in that his poetic craft leads him to unique heavenly experiences. The poet's dream is of a different quality than ordinary people's *insomnium*. Both the dreamer in *PF* and the Latin poet reach the higher spheres in their dreams. Therefore one can conclude that the influence of the Latin text goes well beyond the opening ten lines, which have been the major focus of criticism. In effect, like Claudianus, the *PF* narrator's dream is not false given that it does not disappear with sleep. From an *insomnium* it shifts to the height of an *oraculum*. Furthermore the result of his dream exists in the form of the actual poem.

#### Oneiric Language

Unlike the initial passage of *HF*, which is somehow detached from the rest of the poem, here elements of dream-lore are included within the narrator's dream and are integral parts of the preparation towards the narration of the dream. The narrator has reported the main ideas contained in *The Dream of Scipio* – 'Of his sentence I wol yow seyn the greete' (l. 35) – that he has read during the day. When the narrator's 'spirit' (l. 92) finds some rest, the readers are forewarned that Scipio himself appeared in the narrator's dream standing right near his bedside, just as he was described in the book. The lack of light deprives the reader of his book. It is the moment when the day ends

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and the night starts to fall (ll. 85-7). This could merely be a reference to chronological time, signifying that sleep time is approaching. However, it recalls the moment between daylight and darkness, when it is neither day nor night: the only instant when the passage from the earthly dimension to eternity is possible. This unique moment of the day represents the invisible gate between the two worlds.<sup>231</sup>

From the linguistic perspective two points are to be stressed: the emphasis on the visual element, and the occurrence of the verb 'mete' employed to describe the apparition near the dreamer's bedside. As to the first, the visual aspect is reinforced by a number of details. Most remarkably the dreamer states that he sees African in the very same guise as Scipio had previously seen him. He is not visualised as the reader might have imagined him while reading. The dreamer has appropriated the vision another author had had centuries earlier. The poet reading Scipio's vision absorbs that image to such an extent that in his own dream he sees the very same image:

And in my slep I mette, as that I lay,  
How Affrican, ryght in the selve aray  
That Scipion hym say byfore that tyde,  
Was come and stod right at my beddes syde (ll. 95-8)

As regards the use of 'mete', the image of African standing beside the bedside is associated with the verb twice in the space of a few lines: 'That made me to mete that he stod there' (l. 108); and '[a]nd madest me this sweven for to mete' (l. 115). One could argue that the verb 'mete' is employed frequently to render the same degree of intensity expressed by Claudianus's vision. In the Latin text the poet sees himself standing in the heavenly vault in front of Jove. 'Videbar' is the pivotal verb of the main clause on which the poet's vision hinges. The Latin poet sees himself within the

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<sup>231</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Symplegades*, pp. 472-3.



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vision of the sky from an external perspective detached from himself. Although the dreamer in *PF* does not see himself as externalised in the oneiric landscape, the visual aspect is reinforced by the recurrent employment of 'mete'. The same choice of verb is made in *NPT* when Chauntecleer narrates St Kenelm's dream: the saint 'mette a thyng' (l. 3112). In that dream too the apparition occurs near the dreamer's bedside.

Within the perspective of dream classification and interpretation, Chaucer reaffirms his awareness of the vast literature on dreams and his two stanzas fall within the dream-lore tradition assimilated in the Middle Ages. He accepts Macrobius as authority and acknowledges that some dreams originate from natural causes and daily concern. However, he proceeds further, by stressing the pivotal role of study and knowledge. At first Chaucer constructs the expectation that he is about to narrate an *insomnium*. And yet the desire for study differentiates it from other dreams originated by daily thoughts. The wish for knowledge stands out from the listed daily concerns, which are shown mainly as material desires. Love too is represented in its more physical aspect, given that Chaucer's lover accomplishes his desire by having won his beloved. Further to this through Scipio's apparition Chaucer introduces the pivotal element characterising the *oraculum*. Although generated by daily concerns his dream does not pertain to the category of the *insomnium*. Finally, given that the poet acquires some new knowledge, the value of the dream does not vanish with sleep – as an *insomnium* would – but in contrast it endures and remains significant after sleep. In effect, the dream is materialised into his poem. Thus Chaucer acknowledges a mixed category: a dream originating in 'study' and the desire for knowledge, reflecting the association of the activity of the mind in daytime and in sleep. Once the *insomnium* has been dignified through its content, it can be transformed into the higher form of *oraculum*.

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A second aspect remains deserving attention that concerns the oneiric terminology. As has been shown above, similarities between Chaucer's *PF* and Claudianus's *Preface* are not limited to the mere translation of a few lines from Latin into Middle English. Like Claudianus, Chaucer adds the poet to the crowd of dreamers with magnificent results at the end of the oneiric experience. Both have their poetic creations as fruit of their 'dream'. Thus it appears that 'stody', interpreted as correspondent to 'cogitatio', represents a preparatory stage towards 'drem', the creative state of consciousness within which poetry is generated. Moreover, in both dreams the visual aspect is emphasised. It is pertinent to wonder whether or not Middle English 'me mette' could render the Latin 'videbar'. One could broach the following question: if 'me mette' echoes 'videbar', can 'me mette' take on other nuances in addition to the impersonal structure? At this stage of the research this question remains still open.<sup>232</sup>

### Oneiric States

In *PF* Chaucer does not introduce the audience in his bedchamber directly but rather to the state of mind in between ordinary wakefulness and transitional states. The number of terms deployed in one stanza pointing to the transition between states would confirm this. Concurrently the audience is presented with the theme of Love and books, which indirectly lead to the poet's bedchamber as an implicit thread that by now Chaucer's audience would recognise.

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<sup>232</sup> C. Marchello-Nizia remarks that starting from the twelfth century within the narration of dreams the impersonal formulas 'me sembla', and 'avis me fu' appear, which is related to Latin 'mihi visum est', C. Marchello-Nizia, 'La rhétorique des songes et le songe comme rhétorique dans la littérature française médiévale', in *I sogni nel Medio Evo: seminario internazionale, Roma, 2-4 ottobre 1983*, T. Gregory ed., Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985, pp. 245-259, p. 247.

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Since the very outset the poem is based on contrasts apt to prepare the audience for the poet's transitional state. Long and short, heavy and light are opposed and above all 'the dredeful joy' (l. 3) is evidenced. The dual level of meaning embedded in the god of Love as Lord and syre (l. 12) recalling Christ and God has been noticed.<sup>233</sup> Soon after the poet remarks that his 'felyng' 'stonieth' (ll. 4-5). Feeling is also the term employed by mystics to refer to their mystical experience (see ch. 2, p. 122). The *enjambement* foregrounds the poet's astonishment, 'astonieth', which is reinforced soon after by the ambivalence of 'flete or synke'. The alternative reading of this line as 'wake or wynke'<sup>234</sup> would be consonant with the oneiric atmosphere the poet introduces. However, though either reading is acceptable, the poet wishes to convey that he does not know his state, reiterating the doubt expressed in *HF* that he does not know whether he is living his experience in body or in 'gost' (l. 981). The lack of light interrupts his reading and the long labour of the day causes the poet to fall fast asleep. Although dream psychology is deemed to be more realistic here,<sup>235</sup> one could doubt whether the poet's sleep is literal. In contrast to *BD* the poet sleeps soundly (*HF*, l. 94), he has overcome his sleeplessness and has recovered. The day's labour can be paralleled to the meditation on reading, one of the stages invoked by the mystics.

#### The Gate in the Wall

Once within the 'drem', the dreamer enters the walled garden through a gate. As in *HF* here again the dreamer signals the threshold of the next stage in which he is able

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<sup>233</sup> L. Besserman, *Chaucer's Biblical Poetics*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, p. 176. Besserman notices resemblances between Love as Lord and Syre recalling Christ in John 4. 11, 15, 19; and the god of Love capable of performing miracles (l. 11) recalls the God of Exodus 11. 7. Line 14 in *PF* aims to readjust the appropriate hierarchy, p. 175.

<sup>234</sup> Havely, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 233 n. 7.

<sup>235</sup> Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, Trend & Co. 1963, repr. 1968, p. 137.

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to have the vision concealed beyond the wall. Although the inscriptions are of Dantean origin,<sup>236</sup> Chaucer introduces two opposing messages at either sides of the gate. It has been remarked that positing of one gate gives 'no choice'.<sup>237</sup> The gate is a traditional *topos*, as the access to the beyond is unique. Although the inscriptions sound ambiguous, they are honest: they cannot promise either, in that the experience occurring beyond depends on the individual.<sup>238</sup> One may notice firstly that it is not the choice that is negated but rather that the vision beyond the wall cannot be decided on the base of reason; the dreamer has 'no wytte' (l. 146) to choose. Secondly this explains that the dreamer is not in the ordinary state in which reason has control of the mind: he is in the transitional state of *stupor*. He has just articulated that he is 'astoned' (l. 142). Thus rather than a lack of choice, it can be deemed that the choice does not reside in which path to follow beyond the wall, but rather it is a matter of choice as to whether or not to step into the next stage, whether or not pass through the gate.<sup>239</sup> In the beyond there are not two different places: it is the traveller's experience that is unique.<sup>240</sup>

As has been seen in *HF*, the access into the beyond must be immediate, the hero must be quick. Indeed in *HF* the dreamer was taken into the whirling House by the eagle. Here African shoving the dreamer through the gate can be deemed comic. However, it still retains a fundamental element of the passage to the beyond:

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<sup>236</sup> D. Alighieri, *Inf.*, III, ll. 1-3, and 10-11.

<sup>237</sup> Clemen remarks that 'whoever goes through the gateway accepts both possibilities', *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p. 140. Knight interprets the unavoidability of conflicts and remarks that 'good and bad are inextricably interwoven', *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 26.

<sup>238</sup> See also *TC* and *Troilus* passing through the ultimate gate, p. 163.

<sup>239</sup> The contrasting inscriptions reiterate the sense of opposition lingering since the opening. The inscriptions make the dreamer fearful and bold, hot and cold (ll. 145-7), wondering whether to enter or flee. Brewer connects the ambivalence of the inscriptions with the first two stanzas. However, he focuses on the ambivalence of Love; *The Parlement of Fouhys*, ed. D. S. Brewer, London, Nelson, 1964, p. 19.

<sup>240</sup> On the two roads of life and death see *Jeremiah* xxi:8, and Patch, *The Other World according to Descriptions in Medieval Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1950, p. 87. See also Coomaraswamy, 'Symplegades'.

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speediness. In effect 'fast' is reiterated thrice: in the first inscription itself; on the occasion that African takes the dreamer by his hand; and by the verb 'shoofe' (ll. 133; 154; 170).<sup>241</sup>

#### Beyond the Wall

Once on the other side the dreamer's first sensation is joy. '[G]lad' (l. 171) echoing the first inscription – 'be glad' (l. 132) – unveils the dreamer's path. Blissfulness is reiterated by the sense of 'joy' at the sight of the trees (l. 175) and by the crucial paradisiacal element: the atemporality (l. 208) of the place. There one cannot grow sick or old, nor does night fall (ll. 208-9). The feeling of atemporality experienced is ineffable (l. 209). The elements constituting the park are introduced hierarchically, from the trees, the garden, the river, the birds' song defined as 'ravishing' (l. 198), and in harmony with the musical noise caused by the wind blowing through the leaves,<sup>242</sup> to the ineffability of atemporality.

Within the park the temple of 'bras' is strongly founded on pillars. Following the description through the dreamer's eyes the audience is led first around the temple (l. 232), then above (l. 237), and finally before the 'dore' (l. 239) that is covered by a 'curtain' (l. 240) held by Patience. The curtain recalls the 'veil' that was used to separate the most sacred space in the temple from the rest of the space.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> In Dante's *Inf.*, III, ll. 19-21, Virgil takes the poet by the hand before passing through the gate. Middle English 'fast' also has the meaning of 'firm', *MED*, 'fast'. In these instances, it appears that it is employed with the meaning 'fast', 'quick'.

<sup>242</sup> Patch notices that the wind creating a sound among the leaves is a motif less conventional than the flowers, and the trees, *The Other World*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>243</sup> The sighs that the dreamer hears soon after entering the temple recall the sighs Dante hears after he has been led by Virgil into the circle of the Lustful, *Inf.*, V, 22.

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The return to the place where he was initially (l. 295) involves the circularity of the dreamer's path, and the completion of a stage. Now the dreamer moves to the next stage on having completed a circular path (this aspect is explored below, p. 212), his vision can continue and he walks in search for 'solace'.<sup>244</sup> In this stage the dreamer can see Nature as a goddess, who is defined, an empress 'full of grace' (l. 319).<sup>245</sup> Further Chaucer adds other biblical references, as in 'blysfyl place' (ll. 48; 83), 'blisse' (l. 72).<sup>246</sup> Following the section describing the birds' debate, as in *BD*, *PF* appears to rush from the 'drem' to the return to wakefulness, through the one-stanza roundel.<sup>247</sup> The repetition of 'rede' (four times in four lines, ll. 691-4) leads to the opening scene: the poet's final thought consists in his intention to continue reading in the hope that he 'shal mete' (l. 693) something that will do him some good (ll. 693-4).<sup>248</sup>

The circularity of the poem remains to be dealt with. The dreamer arrives at the place where he first was before seeing Nature (l. 295); the dreamer is woken up by the birds' roundel; and soon after the poem is completed by the cycle: reading, dreaming, reading. The end of the poem directs to a new beginning. Reading has triggered a 'drem' which leads towards more reading, which supposedly will create another 'drem'. The circular pattern (the dance around the temple; the birds' roundel; the poet's progress, walking beyond the wall as reading in real life) draws one to consider

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<sup>244</sup> *MED*, 'solas': 'joy', both in physical and spiritual sense. For another employment of 'solas' see the discussion of *TC* below, p. 163. Clemen reads this stage as the sense of 'despondency' felt by the dreamer, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p. 148.

<sup>245</sup> Brewer notices the holiness of Nature yielded by this expression that is employed as salutation to the Virgin Mary, *Parlement*, p. 29, n. 2. On the influence of Alain's figure of Nature, see D. Brewer ed., *The Parlement of Fouhys*, pp. 26 ff; and Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, pp. 148 ff.

<sup>246</sup> Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, p. 133. Brewer maintains that Chaucer meshes old authority with new material of experience, or else the world according to the *Dream of Scipio* would be 'incomplete', pp. 18-19.

<sup>247</sup> Knight underscores the revolving pattern of the birds' roundel that harmonises contrasts in Nature such as Winter and Summer, as sung by the birds, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 30.

<sup>248</sup> For the two meanings of 'mete' – 'to dream' and 'to encounter', 'to find' – see Knight, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 31, and Havely, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 268. Without dismissing the possible pun or double sense intended by the poet, in this context the meaning 'drem' would be consistent with the oneiric state conveyed by the opening.

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oppositions. Nature, defined as 'vicar of the Almighty God (l. 379), has 'knit' together the various elements of the creation harmoniously (l. 380). After the dreamer has dwelt since the outset on a series of contrasts, black-gold (l. 141) hot-cold (l. 145); heavy-light; and moist-dry (l. 380), of these the first echoes the dreamer's sensation in front of the gate, Nature's activity harmonises what so far the human perspective has perceived as opposed.<sup>249</sup> Nature's binding the creation in all its aspects reiterates the circular patterns of the poem.<sup>250</sup> The expression 'yer by yer' (l. 236) provides a further confirmation of the circular pattern. To mention the temporal calculation of the year in an atemporal context – depicted by the round dance of the women around the temple – leads to the idea of circular time, in which neither beginning nor ending is defined. Circular time pertains to the sphere of the sacred as opposed to linear time characterising the human world (see p. 69).

To return to the debate concerning the dream genre of *PF*, these considerations, together with African's appearance, would suggest that *PF* is more than an *insomnium*. The final expression of the poet's will to continue reading to trigger a moment when he will 'mete' (l. 693) is crucial. His attitude is a far cry from the passive attitude in which everyday activities provoke *insomnium*, a dream not worth interpreting. In contrast here the poet chooses the daily activity so that he can generate a certain kind of 'drem'. By his reading the poet wishes to influence his oneiric world. It contrasts with the *insomnium*. It rather recalls the rituals of *incubatio* that was meant to prepare

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<sup>249</sup> Brewer interprets the birds' roundel in Boethian terms of 'agreement of things bound together', *Parlement*, p. 25. Knight foregrounds the rhyme structure of ll. 666-72 aiming to introduce harmony. Further, Knight also remarks that if the roundel was expanded as was usual, the whole poem would consist of seven hundred lines or one hundred stanzas. This would symbolise that the order and harmony that have not been found on earth are achievable in art, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 30.

<sup>250</sup> The idea of the bound creation is expressed by Macrobius as the golden chain in *Commentary*, Book I, 14, 15; and in Boethius, *De consolazione*, Bk III, m. 9. For the concept of the 'scale of Nature' according to which all the elements of the world find their place, see Brewer, *Parlement*, pp. 27-8.

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the sleeper to receive a dream from the divinity.<sup>251</sup> In effect the terms *incubatio*, *cubiculum*, the cell where the meditative poet withdraws, stem from the same root as *cubare* 'to lie down'.<sup>252</sup> The poet is often depicted as lying in bed, as for instance in the illumination 'Poet and Nature' where Nature appears in the poet's bedchamber (see Fig. 1).<sup>253</sup>

To conclude: the poet's astonishment enabling him access to the garden beyond the wall, the temple of brass, the birds' assembly, and the perception of Nature harmoniously binding the creation confer on the 'drem' a significance far-removed from an *insomnium*. Like the birds singing the roundel, and the dance around the temple, the dreamer-persona – with his reading, dreaming, reading – becomes part of the harmonious circular pattern. Returning to the lines from Claudian that Chaucer does not include (ll. 99-105), one could argue that they are only apparently missing. As the Latin poet finds himself and his poetry among the gods in a dream, so too in a 'drem' Chaucer is guided by African to the beyond, and transforms his vision into poetry.

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<sup>251</sup> 'Incubatio' means to sleep in a sacred space. Some of the techniques that prepare for *incubatio* are common with the practices aiming to achieve the control of the body according to the mystics, including fasting, isolation, and praying, see E. R. Dodds, *I Greci e l'irrazionale*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1978, pp. 133 ff.

<sup>252</sup> E. Forcellini, *Totius Latinitatis lexicon*, London, Baldwin et Cradock, 1828, entries 'cubiculum' and 'incubus' <[http://www.veritatis-societas.org/219\\_Forcellini/1688-1768\\_Forcellini\\_Aeg\\_Lexicon\\_Totius\\_Latinitatis\\_Vol\\_1\\_A-C\\_%28Furlanetto\\_Ed%29\\_LT.pdf](http://www.veritatis-societas.org/219_Forcellini/1688-1768_Forcellini_Aeg_Lexicon_Totius_Latinitatis_Vol_1_A-C_%28Furlanetto_Ed%29_LT.pdf)> [accessed December 2010]

<sup>253</sup> From Bennett, *Parlement of Foules*, facing p. 108.





**Fig. 1 -**  
Nature and a Poet, *Le Livre des Échecs amoureux*, Paris,  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. MS 9197, fol. 13, 15<sup>th</sup> c., from  
J. A. W. Bennett, *Parlement of Fowles*, facing p. 108.

## Chapter 4 – *Troilus and Criseyde*

### Preface

It might seem surprising that within the investigation of oneiric phenomena and mystical writing, *TC* occupies a large part of the study. In *TC* Criseyde's dream of the eagle, Troilus's dream of the wild boar, and Pandarus's view on dream interpretation do readily come to mind. But other dream-related phenomena may be easily overlooked: Criseyde dreaming of Pandarus, Pandarus's slumbering in Book II, and instances of oneiric terminology. In this chapter the three main threads of the present research intertwine: the discourse on the classification of dreams as illustrated in chapter 1; the mystics' ascending experience of bridging the earthly and the netherworld in chapter two; and the employment of the oneiric figurative imagery in literary work to convey the significance of the poet entering a transitional oneiric state – 'drem' – leading to creation of poetry.

The following analysis of *TC* is organised in three parts. The first deals with the 'dreams' proper (Criseyde's dream of the heart, Troilus's dream of the wild boar, and his nightmares) together with Cassandra's interpretation, and Pandarus's view on the value of dreams. The second part investigates Troilus's progress from earthly love to his apotheosis, by paralleling his plight with the mystics' ecstatic journey. This analysis sheds light on the inner narrative structure of the poem by rendering evident the influence of mystical intertext on the underlying narrative structure. Troilus's mystic-like inner growth is marked by falling in love; suffering from heroic love; his union with Criseyde; his ascent to the heavenly spheres: these are pivotal moments of the poem. This provides the work with a gradual ascending development comparable to the image of the mystical ladder to perfection (see ch. 2). Troilus's final ascension

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to the higher spheres of heaven acquires new resonances when read from the perspective of transitional states that bridge this world to the beyond.

The final part explores Criseyde dreaming about Pandarus thrice; Pandarus's slumber whilst the nightingale sings; Troilus composing in the garden. From a close analysis it appears that these minor oneiric phenomena possess an implicit function of 'drem' rather than 'dreams'. Thus they are explored as such within the context of transitional states leading to poetry: they are related to the multi-levelled narrative structure of the poem, and illustrate figuratively the creation of poetry. Through these states Chaucer interlaces reflections upon the act of writing and narrating. They form levels of narration-within-narration that are signposted by the Poet, the Narrator, and the characters.<sup>1</sup> The audience is encompassed as part of a further outer framework.

### 4. 1. DREAMS PROPER

#### Criseyde's Dream

The dream element is fundamental in Chaucer's poetry, be it 'dream' or 'drem'. Here too dreams constitute a net of references within the text. Criseyde 'wex somewhat able to converte' (II, 903) to loving Troilus after hearing Antigone's song and having let them be imprinted in her heart.<sup>2</sup> Her dream marks the beginning of the next important stage towards love: her transformation towards being a woman after being

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Narrator' is used in reference to *Troilus and Criseyde* in this section, even though aware that 'narrator' belongs to the printed rather than orally exposed literary works, see D. Brewer, 'Comedy and Tragedy in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in P. Boitani ed., *European Tragedy of Troilus*, Oxford, Clarendon Press; New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 95-109, p. 96. The term will be useful later in order to distinguish the various levels of frameworks within the text

<sup>2</sup> As J. D. Burnley notices, in poetry 'heart' replaces 'brain', see *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition*, Ipswich, Boydell Press, 1979, p. 105.

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converted (II, 903); consequently this allows Troilus's growth into a perfect lover-knight.<sup>3</sup>

The dream has been paralleled to Dante's and Boccaccio's works where a griffin appears.<sup>4</sup> In Boccaccio's work it is Troilus who discards Criseyde's heart by means of a griffin.<sup>5</sup> However, if it is agreed that the dream revolves around the exchange of the hearts rather than on the similarity of the animals dreamt, two more episodes could be recalled. Firstly in *Filostrato* Pandaro admits having changed Criseida's pure heart with Troilo's love:

per te ho io corrotto il petto sano  
di mia sorella, e posto l'ho nel core  
il tuo amor [...]<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, Pandarus's placing Troilus's letter in Criseyde's breast recalls the exchange occurring in the dream.<sup>7</sup> The substitution of the heart also recalls the experience of falling in love as narrated by Dante in *Vita nuova*. After seeing Beatrice for the first time, Dante withdraws into his room where he has the following vision: the God of Love – whose aspect is terrifying – holds Beatrice in his hands together with the poet's heart. The god offers his heart to the lady of 'salute' who feeds herself with it. Frightened by the image the poet awakes and writes the first sonnet of *Vita Nuova*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. D. Burnley remarks that the black clothes Criseyde wears from Book I (l. 309) recall those of a nun. 'Chaucer's *Termes*', YES, 7 (1977) 53-67, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> D. Alighieri, *Purg.*, XXIX, 108; Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, 7. 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> G. Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, 7. 24, 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> [for you I have corrupted the pure heart  
Of my sister, and I have put in her heart

Your love [...]] *Filostrato*, 3. 6, 3-5. See also B. A. Windeatt, 'Chaucer and the *Filostrato*' in *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, P. Boitani ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 162-183, p. 175.

<sup>7</sup> M. Lambert, 'Troilus, Books I-III: A Criseydan Reading', in Mary Salu ed., *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 105-125, p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> D. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 1 <<http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it>> [accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010]

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The replacement of Criseyde's heart has been usually interpreted as anticipation of physical love in Book III. The eagle as a violent and predatory bird is read as representing Troilus<sup>9</sup> and Diomedes.<sup>10</sup> Leyerle stresses how the 'heart' is the nucleus not just of the dream but of the whole poem. He points out how the theme of the exchange of the heart is connected to religious writing and Saints' lives.<sup>11</sup> Leyerle recalls two meaningful instances: the exchange of St Catherine of Siena's heart with Christ's, and the sleeping king's heart being exchanged by Amour who yields it to Vif-désir as occurs in *Le Livre du cuer d'amours espris* (c. 1457) (See fig. 1).<sup>12</sup> The first points to the mystical tradition of the theme, whereas the second shows that the inheritance is still evident in profane literature in the following century. Other similarities between this work and the mystical tradition are explored below (see pp. 241 ff.).

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<sup>9</sup> See B. A. Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Oxford, Clarendon paperback ed., Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> J. E. Gallagher, 'Criseyde's Dream of the Eagle. Love and War in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *MLQ*, 36 (1975) 115-32, p. 118. According to Gallagher, who aims to demonstrate the relationship between love and war in the poem, the eagle also stands for Diomedes. He maintains that Criseyde's dream is an *insomnium* according to Macrobius's classification because the dream is influenced by Antigone's song and the bird's singing. He also recalls Macrobius's mentioning the lover as one of the dreamers who are likely to experience the *insomnium* because of their condition. Gallagher acknowledges that Criseyde's dream cannot be only an *insomnium*, and hypothesises a kind of prophetic dream, p. 118, n. 8. Reflecting the influence of post-Freudian theory, Gallagher's argument centres on the violent image. However, his concept of ecstasy sounds dubious particularly when he states that 'Criseyde dreams of being savaged painlessly, perhaps even ecstatically', p. 122. Moreover, the very fact that the eagle is read as Troilus signifies that the dream presents at least one element that requires interpretation. Further to this the discourse of violence underlying the dream and that is to be read carefully within the network of correspondences of the text, identifies it as a *somnium*.

<sup>11</sup> J. Leyerle, 'The Heart and the Chain', in *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, L. D. Benson ed, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974, pp. 113-145, pp. 137 ff., in particular p. 139. Leyerle takes the eagle as standing for Troilus. However, he deems the influence of Antigone's song on the subsequent dream as probable, pp. 127-8.

<sup>12</sup> Leyerle, 'The Heart and the Chain', pp. 139-41. For the image see <<http://www.guice.org/bklvnr2.html>> [accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2010].



**Fig. 2** - *Le Livre du cuer d'amours espris*, Vienna, Austrian National Library, Codex Vindobonensis 2597, fol. 2, c. 1457 <<http://www.guice.org/bklvf-02.html>> [accessed 7th June 2010]

### **Pandarus on Dreams**

Further to Criseyde's dream, Chaucer introduces two oneiric phenomena experienced by Troilus: the night of frightening visions that haunt him after learning of Criseyde's exchange; and his dream of the boar. This will lead to the dream interpretation process, which is interlaced with the discourse of truth and falsehood.

Pandarus expresses his view on dreams on two occasions: firstly after the night when Troilus is haunted by his 'fantasies'; secondly after Troilus's dream of the boar.

Unexpectedly, Pandarus's view on dream-lore theories is expressed before Troilus has the proper dream of the boar. Troilus has been awake for most of the night (V, ll. 211-13). After unburdening his heart through tears and speaking alone, he falls into an agitated slumber during which he dreams of the most dreadful situations that could happen (V ll. 246-8), including finding himself alone amongst enemies, and falling captive. Subsequently he suddenly wakes up, shakes, makes a sound as if he

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was falling from high, and weeps so much that it 'wonder was to here his fantasie' (l. 261). '[F]antasie' is the term defining these phenomena Troilus experiences. Apart from 'fantasie' and the verbs 'dremen' (l. 248) and 'mete' (ll. 249; 251), no other oneiric terms are used here. Later Troilus explains to Pandarus that through his 'maladie' and his 'dremes' he foresees that he has to die. Troilus employs 'dremes' as opposed to Pandarus's definition as 'fantasie' (l. 329). Here the term can have a wider significance, as Troilus foreknows his destiny. It could be argued that 'dremes' here include some prophetic connotation, and that together with 'maladie' it parallels the mystics' experience. The implications of this possible nuance are explored at large below (see p. 254).

Even though Pandarus plays the role of the sceptic, he proves to be learned on dream-lore. He diagnoses that Troilus's 'swevnes ek and al swich fantasie [...] procede of (thi) malencolie' (V, ll. 358-60) which causes him suffering during sleep. He then lists the different theories. Priests maintain that dreams may be either divine revelations or caused by infernal illusions; doctors theorise that they depend on the complexion, the abundance or deprivation of food. Others maintain that dreams are originated by 'impressiouns' (V, 372) after some image having being held in the mind for a long time. Finally Pandarus recalls that dreams depend on the season of the year, and the lunar cycle, and argues that all this nonsense should be left to old women and to augurers who read the future by observing the birds. All in all Pandarus encourages Troilus not to believe dreams (l. 378), stressing that doing so would be both 'fals and foul' (l. 383) and that a noble creature should not believe such 'ordure' (l. 385). While mentioning the theories on dream-lore Pandarus asserts twice that nobody can know the meaning of dreams, and that he does not deem dreams meaningful (V, ll. 362-3). Finally Pandarus's list presents a descending curve:

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from the priests to 'ordure'. Could this be an echo of the christianised Narrator facing pagan customs and implicitly judging them through Pandarus's voice?

By the term 'impressiouns' (V, 372) it can be inferred that Pandarus is aware of the power of *ymaginacioun*, even though it is not mentioned. Indeed by mentioning the 'impressiouns' that can originate dreams, he implicitly acknowledges the influence of *ymaginacioun*. Moreover two concepts are stressed: the falsehood and insignificance conveyed by dreams; and their being defined as 'foul' (V, 383), reinforced by the term 'ordure' (V, 385). In this case the dream debate is not detached from the whole structure of the work. It cannot be stated how honest Pandarus's view is, as it has to be considered within the plot. The function that he has taken on from the beginning is to sustain Troilus in achieving his love, and here to comfort him.<sup>13</sup> At this stage of the plot Pandarus can but continue in his purpose by spurring Troilus to behave in a more 'virile' manner. However, it is significant that Pandarus invokes God's help whilst asserting the insignificance of dreams: 'God helpe me so, I counte hem nought a bene!' (V, 363)

Pandarus's second intervention on dreams occurs after Troilus's dream of the boar. Pandarus's claim of the insignificance of dreams is uttered more weakly in this context, though he opposes his interpretation to that of Troilus's. The whole stanza is worth quoting as it includes the main issues that have an impact on the unfolding of the following narrative: correct dream interpretation; dreading dreams; falsehood of dreams (related to Criseyde's supposed untruth); and Criseyde's untruth:

Pandare answerde and seyde, 'Allas the while

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<sup>13</sup> See W. C. Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1960, [1926], p. 199. Hieatt does not seem to agree with Curry's view, see C. B. Hieatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions. The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and his Contemporaries*, The Hague-Paris, Mouton & Co., 1967, p. 37, n. 10.



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That I was born! Have I nat seyde er this,  
That dremes many a maner man bigile?  
And whi? For folk expounden hem amys.  
How darstow seyn that fals thy lady ys  
For any drem, right for thyn owene drede?  
Lat be this thought; thow kanst no dremes rede'. (*TC*, V, ll. 1275-81)

Outwardly Pandarus reiterates the core concepts of his previous speech: no one knows dreams' true meaning, in fact they are meaningless. However, Pandarus's view is now slightly modified. His argument shifts from lack of significance to the manner in which dreams are interpreted. Dreams deceive many people, because 'folk expounden hem amys' (l. 1278). This line could be interpreted to signify that dreams deceive because 'people interpret them wrongly', as well as 'because people expound them badly'. In the first case Pandarus implicitly acknowledges that dreams are worth interpretation: it is a matter of wrong interpretation rather than of falsehood innate in dreams themselves. In the second, the cause is the dreamer's inability to narrate his dream adequately. Pandarus does not dwell on the insignificance of dreams, but rather he blames Troilus, for he cannot interpret dreams – 'thow kanst no dremes rede' (l. 1281). Unexpectedly he moves on by interpreting Troilus' dream himself: the boar is Criseyde's father rather than a possible lover. This is the right manner to 'expound' the dream. In this case 'expound' (V, 1288) surely refers to the act of interpretation.

Because Troilus believes that his dream contains a divine message, it takes all Pandarus's skill – and Troilus's blind trust helps greatly – to convince him that dreams need a correct interpretation. Troilus is no interpreter and Pandarus's understanding can be just as valid. In his ability to manipulate events and people who trust him, Pandarus reverses what Troilus can still doubt, but that the readers know as truth. In so doing Chaucer brings the theme of truth and falsehood to the fore:

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How darstow seyn that fals thy lady ys  
For any drem, right for thyn owene drede? (V, ll. 1279-80)

Here 'fals' and 'right' are located in a strategic position within the lines. Pandarus confronts Troilus, who dares doubt Criseyde's fidelity on the basis of a dream. Although 'right' (l. 1280) does not have the function of an adjective, it still expresses an explicit contrast to 'fals'. Pandarus proceeds then to put forth his own interpretation and concludes: 'Thus sholdestow thi drem aright expound' (V, 1288). When Troilus doubts his own sensation – thus stepping away from truth – he wonders how he can achieve a correct understanding. Pandarus encourages him to move further away from truth by commenting that Troilus finally speaks 'wisly' (V, 1291).

As has been previously noticed in *HF*, the dream debate is interwoven with the discourse concerning truth and falsehood. In this case it contemplates the narration of dreams and their correct interpretation, among the many possible. The issue of falsehood and its implications in the development of Troilus towards his ascent will be explored in greater depth in the following two sections regarding Troilus's dream and Cassandra's interpretation. In the dialogue with Cassandra, Troilus' reaction towards the possible truth is depicted. Thus Chaucer exploits the opportunity to explore the relationship between truth and falsehood further.

### **Troilus's Dream of the Boar**

Troilus's dream of the boar is not defined by any oneiric term:

[...] yn his slep hym thoughte  
That in a forest faste he welk to wepe  
For love of here that hym these peynes wroughte;  
And up and down as he the forest soughte,

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He mette he saugh a bor with tuskes grete,  
That slepte ayeyn the bryghte sonnes hete. (V, ll. 1234-1239)

The Narrator introduces the readers gradually into the dream: from 'hym thoughte', it seemed to him to be walking in a forest, to the verb 'he mette' (l. 1238), reinforced by 'he saugh'. The act of seeing is emphasised by the contrast of the sleeping boar. It is the very sight of his beloved, 'he it gan to byholde' (l. 1242), embracing and kissing the boar that provokes his sorrow and his anger that wake him up, 'breyde' (l. 1243). The term 'drem' recurs twice when the dream is over and Troilus refers to his oneiric vision:

'The blysfyl goddes thorough here grete myght  
Han in my drem yshewed it ful right.  
Thus yn my drem Criseyde have I byholde' (V, ll. 1250-52)

The visual aspect is central, as the gods have shown Troilus the truth about Criseyde. The gods and, it could be argued, Troilus's will to know spur him to wander in the forest towards truth. Nonetheless Troilus's dream is not a vision. Being a 'figure', the significance of the boar remains obscure. Troilus significantly refers to it as 'drem', in agreement with the Narrator who recalls the relevance of the memory and stresses that the boar is a symbol to be interpreted:

This drem, of which I told have ek byforn,  
May nevere outen of his remembraunce.  
He thought ay wel he hadde his lady lorn,  
And that Joves of his purveyance  
Hym shewed hadde in slep the signifaunce  
Of hire untrouthe and his disaventure,  
And that the boor was shewed hym in figure. (V, ll. 1443-49)

Several points can be made on this stanza. Firstly there is a close correspondence between the medical theory on the role of *yimaginacioun* and remembrance, and the visionary activity of Troilus depicted here. The oneiric experience with its profound visual impact provokes such an *impressioun* on Troilus that he cannot unburden his

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memory. Before mentioning his remembrance, Troilus endures the effect of the love malady which deprives him of food, drink, sleep, and speech. Further he is experiencing the effects of 'ymaginacioun', which makes him almost mad.

Ymagynyng ay that she was unkynde,  
For which wel neigh he wex out of his mynde. (V, ll. 1441-42)

Here 'ymaginacioun' is associated with dream, and a state near to madness, 'out of his mynde' (l. 1442). 'Ymaginacioun' was believed to be responsible both for storing and composing images. It was also connected with the images seen in the oneiric activity. This association is rooted in the medical lore. Bartholomeus Anglicus confirms the relation between *ymaginacioun* and dreams.<sup>14</sup> He also exemplifies the visions created by this same faculty during the state of illness. He explains that people prone to *frenesis* have wonderful dreams.<sup>15</sup> This corresponds to Troilus's suffering from heroic love. Secondly, the concealed truth shown by 'figure' (l. 1449) implies that the term 'drem' is employed here as parallel to Macrobius's *somnium*. As such it requires interpretation, in that the real significance lies shrouded in a veil (see ch. 1). Finally from the linguistic viewpoint, the emphasis on the visual aspect is provided by the verb 'mete' accompanied by 'see'.<sup>16</sup>

### The Process of Dream Interpretation

In *Troilus* readers have the opportunity to observe the process of dream interpretation performed by a professional interpreter. Believing that his 'dream',

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<sup>14</sup> 'Also me takeþ hede of ymaginaciouns of sweuenes and of fantasies, for in slepinge for medlinge of resoun wip fantasmes þe soule metiþ wip mony fantasies.' *On the Properties of Things*, John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus *De proprietatibus rerum*, A critical text, ed. M. C. Seymour, 2 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, vol. 2, p. 334.

<sup>15</sup> '[A]s it fareþ in ham þat beþ disposid to frenesie and to madnes, þey haueþ wondirful sweuenes þat neuer men herde speke of toforehonde, for as vapour infectiþ and varieþ þe celle of fantasie so þe sweuenes varieþ and beþ diuers', *On the Properties of Things*, p. 338.

<sup>16</sup> 'Mete' is employed in other visions, including St Kenelm's and the sailor's in *NPT*, and the African's appearance in *PF*. There the verb was employed on its own without 'see'. On dreams and the expression 'me mette', see pp. 30 n. 147, 163 n. 232.

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*somnium*, contains a hidden truth sent by the divinity, Troilus asks his sister Cassandra to interpret it. Before her real name is mentioned, she is referred to as 'Sibille' (V, 1450), like Apollo's prophetess whose function was to act as intermediary between the human and the divine world. The communication between these two dimensions is a key aspect within the discourse of the dream debate and will be explored in greater depth within the section concerning the ladder-like structure of *TC* (see pp. 241 ff.). It implies issues including free will and predestination and discernment between truth and falsehood, which are themes woven within the dream discourse throughout Chaucer's works.

First of all Cassandra makes sure that Troilus wishes to hear the truth: 'If thow a soth of this desirest knowe' (l. 1458). If he does he needs to know some old stories from ancient books. Cassandra summarises Statius's *Thebaid* before unveiling the symbol of the boar and assigning him the name of Diomedes. After the slow-paced narration of *Thebaid* Cassandra rushes towards the unveiling of the enigma in a manner that her words could be felt cruel in the ruthlessness of the interpretation:

This Diomedes hire herte hath, and she his.  
Wep if thou wilt, or lef, for out of doute,  
This Diomedes is inne, and thou art oute. (V, ll. 1517-19)

Not only the significance of the boar is revealed, but Troilus's worst fear is confirmed. Towards his own dream Troilus has a twofold reaction. Confronted by Pandarus he senses that his 'dream' conveys something more profound than empty images; in contrast in front of the naked truth Troilus unexpectedly rejects Cassandra's reading.

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If the readers still have any uncertainty as to which interpretation is right, Chaucer brushes them away by making it clear that ‘Cassandre hym gan right thus his drem expounde’ (l. 1456). Here again ‘right’ is held in a central position, accompanied by ‘expounde’. That is partly why Troilus’s incredulity is so unexpected. ‘Thow seyst nat soth’ is his first instinctual reaction. Cassandra is then labelled ‘sorceresse’ (l. 1520). Furthermore she is said to have the ‘false goost of prophecye’ (l. 1521) Troilus’s burst of disbelief mixed with anger is startling, although the audience is aware that Cassandra’s lot is to have her prophecies not believed.

In this light Cassandra’s opening line – ‘If thow a soth of this desirest knowe’ (l. 1458) – acquires new resonance. As an interpreter and a prophetess, Cassandra is well acquainted with the human mind and the turns it unexpectedly may take. Once Troilus is confronted by the truth he chooses not to believe it. He does not wish to believe it, preferring to trust his own constructed truth. This time there is no Pandarus reversing the perspectives; Troilus does it all by himself. Nonetheless his search for the truth continues, ‘he gan enquire and seche / A sooth of this with al his fulle cure’ (ll. 1538-39). This could refer to the ultimate truth of Troilus’s apotheosis.

### **Troilus, Truth, and the Twists of Fate**

On achieving bliss through Criseyde’s love, Troilus’s reaction to Cassandra is crucial within his ‘aventure’ and it triggers two reflections. One involves Troilus’s relationship with truth and the divine world; the second brings to the fore the audience’s response to the text. The audience has undergone shifts of perspective throughout the work. However, here they are involved personally given their

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foreknowledge of the end. In the following section the issue of truth is analysed, whereas the relationship between human and divine worlds, and the audience and the text, are explored in the next section regarding the structure.

Chaucer intertwines dreams, and dream interpretation with the more unfathomable theme of free will, predestination and the connection between falsehood and truth. It emerges in *NPT*, in *HF*, it is pivotal in *TC*. Here, as in *NPT*, the readers witness the reversing of perspectives. When Troilus ought to be most able to discern truth from deception, it is exactly at that moment – when he does not believe Cassandra's words – he is deceived, like Chauntecleer. When confronted by the choice between truth or falsehood, human reactions are not predictable, even less are they rational.

Within the narration at this stage Troilus still has the possibility of choosing what to believe and how to respond to the possible truth. Troilus's fighting for truth within the narrative mirrors every reader confronted by a human dilemma. By having Troilus choose what he wishes to believe, Chaucer dramatises the debate on the core concepts of free will and predestination. He represents this by means of a double twist in Troilus's destiny. The readers almost certainly deem Troilus's decision not to believe Cassandra's words as wrong, and Troilus's decision is sensed as pivotal, providing a presumptively negative twist to his 'aventure'. However, surprisingly this contributes to his final triumph. In effect it is his supposedly wrong decision that leads Troilus to death, to his apotheosis, and to his wider knowledge from the height of the eighth heavenly sphere. Troilus' tragedy is accomplished. And yet, it is exactly then, with Troilus's apotheosis that Chaucer operates the second twist to his narration.

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Whereas the first only involved the fictional Troilus within the plot, the consequences of the second reach out of the narrative and fall onto the readers as well. The second twist, playing upon the difference between Troilus and the readers, is as simple as it is ironically tragic. While following Troilus and identifying with him, the readers are made aware that perhaps he is undergoing the same process of decision-making they experience in life.<sup>17</sup> Humans have to make decisions despite the lack of discrimination between truth and falsehood. Therefore on one hand, the readers, as audience watching the characters moving in their fictional world, acquire a wider perspective and awareness. From their privileged location as audience they can infer how categories of right and wrong decisions – and free or predestined ones – are not accessible to the finite human condition, as opposed to the infinite view from the spheres. Troilus's condition after death is eternal. In contrast, when the fictional world is over, the disbelief ceases, and the readers return to their reality, then they find themselves in exactly Troilus' position before death.<sup>18</sup> But now Troilus looks down at us from above. In contrast to this, the audience's privileged condition is anything but eternal. His laugh is at the earthly lovers. And yet, it is also addressed to the readers of all time.

Troilus's ascension to the heavens is accomplished through his human tragedy.<sup>19</sup>

Troilus's triumph has multiple functions and multi-levelled significance. The triumph explains the tension of free will-predestination. Without Troilus' triumph the readers

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<sup>17</sup> R. M. Jordan notices that in the segment of narration covering Troilus waiting for Criseyde the Narrator steps back until his voice is heard again after the ten days (l. 1205). This causes a highly intense tension in the audience, 'The Narrator in Chaucer's *Troilus*', *ELH*, 25 (1958), 237-57, pp. 248-9.

<sup>18</sup> Jordan stresses the different levels of knowledge of the characters: Pandarus is superior to Troilus, the Narrator has a broader perspective than them both, see 'The Narrator in Chaucer's *Troilus*', p. 257, n. 12.

<sup>19</sup> As E. Talbot Donaldson puts it, 'the poem's ending leads up [...] towards heaven, indeed, but towards heaven through human experience', 'The Ending of *Troilus*', in Barney, p. 130. On the development from 'love of kynde' to celestial love, see also A. E. Farnham, 'Chaucerian Irony and the Ending of *Troilus*', *The Chaucer Review*, 1 (1967), pp. 207-16, pp. 208 ff.



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would never be sure that Troilus made the 'right' decision for his salvation. Secondly the triumph testifies that Troilus as the perfect lover has indeed reached perfection. And this is the apex in which his path as the perfect lover culminates. Finally it reflects back the audience's unawareness of the future in contrast to Troilus's wider insight.

This leads to the second reflection regarding the relationship between the text and the audience. A subtle interrelation should be noticed between the framework of the narration and the readers' response outside that framework. The characters moving within the plot are endowed with a limited awareness whereas the external reader is made aware and is effectively omniscient. From outside the narrative framework the readers witness the process of human decision-making. In their privileged position the audience can differentiate truth from falsehood, correct dream interpretation from incorrect. And yet, the audience are deprived of the possibility of changing the course of events within the plot, just like in real life – which represents their actual tragic condition. They could complain with the poet, who will start *LGW* apologising for what he has previously written. Nonetheless he will not modify the plot of *TC*. The poet is the ultimate maker of poetry.

It would be quite natural for the audience to ask how Troilus's decision not to believe Cassandra is justified. And why does he decide not to trust his own sensations? Several explanations may be put forward. The first, which pertains to the literal plan of plot, is that Troilus suffers from love malady. As love malady strikes him he grows pale, lies on his bed depriving himself of food and merry company, he weeps, faints and loses his consciousness. The only remedy for this is to see the beloved who has the power to heal him. Failure of treatment might lead to death,

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which Troilus often invokes.<sup>20</sup> Considered from this perspective, Troilus epitomises the lover struck by heroic love. As mentioned earlier and in accord with the medicine of the time, *ymaginacioun* makes him nearly go out of his mind (see p. 220). Therefore he is not able to assess reality rationally and sensibly.

A second motive consists in human finiteness. From his human perspective Troilus cannot discern truth. He is imbued with the concerns of a human lover, who from his limited standpoint cannot differentiate between reality as it is, the reality he would wish to see, and the one he construes. From his position of being bound by his physicality he is not provided with the objectivity required to achieve a wider insight. When he is offered the solution of the enigma represented by 'figure' in his dream, in other words when he can see beneath the cortex, he rejects the possibility, and truth with it.

The human condition of being bound and finite involves the relationship between the diviner and the searcher for the absolute truth through the diviner. This leads one to ask whether communication between the two dimensions – human and divine – is possible. The diviner, Cassandra, whose sight pierces the veil of the 'figure', and thus has access to the future, possesses a wider view of the human condition. Troilus cannot share Cassandra's perception as long as he is bound by the chains of earthly love and life. What he cannot perceive from the limited perspective of human life is in contrast achieved from his privileged position acquired from the higher spheres.

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<sup>20</sup> On love sickness see the seminal article by J. Livingston Lowes, 'The Loveres Maladye of Hereos', *MP*, 11 (1914) pp. 491-546; M. Ciavolella, 'La tradizione dell'"aegritudo amoris" nel "Decameron"', *Giornale della letteratura italiana*, 147 (1970) pp. 498-517; D. W. Robertson Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Mediaeval Perspectives*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1962, pp. 458 ff.

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The relationship between ordinary and extra-ordinary planes of awareness broaches a third possible answer to the previous questions which involves reconsidering the whole structure of the work, and the context in which it is set. Further, what is at first perceived as Troilus's fall from bliss proves to be the pivotal point where Chaucer operates his main twist to Troilus's fate: his 'fall' turns into a triumph.

The next section first explains Troilus's triumph in the context of the whole work by analysing the linear, ladder-like structure of the work. It will be seen that Troilus's gradual progress proceeds in a manner similar to that of the medieval mystics, from physicality to the acquisition of a wider knowledge on an extra-ordinary level. The second part identifies four narrative frameworks which constitute what Geoffrey of Vinsauf would call the walls of the poem and that could correspond to Boethius's view of the four degrees of perception. These four are represented by Troilus's 'aventure'; Pandarus's 'plot'; the Narrator telling the story; the Poet. It will then show how the audience is involved in the game of the frames within the narration by means of the continuous shifts of perspectives operated at times by the obtrusiveness of the Narrator. It will also explore how Chaucer craftily intertwines the act of writing-composing with the development of the narrative itself by means of the frameworks.

### ***4.2. THE ASCENDING 'AVENTURE' OF TROILUS***

#### **Preface**

Following on from the analysis of dreams proper, the present section explores Troilus's plight and his ascent to the eighth sphere by relating it to the perspective of the mystics' progress on the ladder towards perfection. Before moving on to explore

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the ladder-like structure, a few prefatory reflections should be noted regarding Chaucer's choice for the historical and the courtly love contexts. In addition to providing a set of characters operating in a well-known plot, the Trojan setting provides a historical context justifying narrative elements that might prove treacherous. Divination, by means of dreams, geomancy, and astrology exploited in order to control people, and manipulate facts could evoke controversy if created in a fourteenth-century setting. In addition to the diviners Calkas and Cassandra, Pandarus's actions are representative of this. His commencing the 'grete emprise' (II, 73) under a favourable Moon, his creating coincidences so that Troilus can meet and address Criseyde, and the statement that 'God and Pandare wist al what this mente' (II, 1561) are a few examples that support Pandarus's skill to originate the thread of events within the natural order of planetary movement and of cosmic harmony.

Chaucer disseminates signs of this divinatory context throughout the poem. The characters are able to perceive them and sometimes unveil them for the audience (for example Troilus, hearing the owl, associates it with his own death); in contrast others are left to the audience: Pandarus's appearance in Criseyde's palace coincides with the ladies reading from Statius's *Thebaid* – the crucial moment when the earth is cracking open swallowing Amphiorax into Hell. This symbolises and anticipates a first instance of communication between the two worlds of the earthly reality and the beyond. When Chaucer interlaces the use of magic with the debate on free will and predestination, truth and illusion, he refers to a legendary past outside measurable historical time.<sup>21</sup> The Trojan setting enables Chaucer to exploit the advantages provided by the world of magic and divination so that Pandarus can achieve his aim.

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<sup>21</sup> Chaucer does this elsewhere: in the 'Nun's Priest's Tale' he refers to the era when 'beestes and briddes koude speke and synge' (CT, NPT, VII, 4071); and he makes clear from the very outset of 'The Franklin's Tale' that it belongs to the 'olde gentil Britouns in hir days' (CT, FrT, V [F] 709).

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At the end of his poem, the Poet can disassociate from this past – clearly circumscribed as pagan as opposed to contemporary Christian – and condemn it.

A historical past, remote as it is, also enables Chaucer to shift from a narrative based on a symbolic level to one which is more realistic. The characters act on the stage of Troy as real human beings. This provides the first level of reading, and of interpretation: the *littera*, and this enacts a fundamental modification in Chaucer's narrative. In a dream-vision characters can be depicted as allegorical personification, as in *RR*, as the oneiric framework points to a further level of reading. The historic setting fixes an exact historic measurable moment in the time past and transforms symbols into human characters.<sup>22</sup> In contrast a dream, whether during physiological sleep or within a poem, requires interpretation. Albeit not a dream vision, *TC* includes ascending stages and oneiric imagery as identified in dream visions.

### The Courtly Love Setting – Criseyde

One might wonder why Chaucer overlaps courtly rules in a narrative of love and betrayal within the Trojan setting. The audience would play an important role in the choice, being the main beneficiary of the work and familiar with *fin amor* conventions and meanings. Moreover, through the rules of courtly love Chaucer blends the religion of love and of God with the transformation from human to heavenly love. Chaucer can draw upon a wide range of situations, terminologies, and ambivalences related to the two aspects of the religion of love that can be left to interpretation. Readers can choose whether to enjoy a love story shaped with expected courtly rules

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<sup>22</sup> See D. Brewer, *Symbolic Stories, Traditional Narratives of the Family Drama in English Literature*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1980, on stories and tales pp. 2 ff.; on Chaucer pp. 92 ff.

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or whether to have an insight into the cortex of the courtly-love story, thus shifting from the *littera* to a deeper level.<sup>23</sup>

The ambiguity played on the two levels of religion of Love and of God requires a modification in Criseyde's representation. Unlike Dante and Petrarch, Chaucer chooses to humanise Criseyde. From an initial state of perfection ('aungelik', I, 102; 'lik a thing immortal', I, 103), an almost untouchable widow, she gradually becomes less idealised. However, her betrayal and her loss trigger the protagonist's spiritual growth through his sorrow. The love scene in Book III, being the pivotal centre of the poem, is also the axle around which turns each character's Fortune's wheel.<sup>24</sup> In a complementary action of rising and descending, while Criseyde's initial perfection strikes readers in opposition to Troilus's imperfection, in the course of the poem – and more precisely after the love union – Criseyde commences to show her human weakness. As a woman, she too is subject to Fortune and has her destiny: to epitomise female betrayal. Had she remained an angelic woman, her literary destiny would have almost certainly been to free herself from the physical burden of the body and die flawless in the manner of Beatrice and Laura. As those symbolic women embody perfection, they cannot dwell on this earth too long: through their deaths, the poets grow in their literary, moral, and earthly lives. Without doubt Criseyde's function is essential in Troilus's growth from love of *kynde* to eternal love. Unlike the angelic women in Dante and Petrarch, Criseyde is endowed with both earthly and ethereal qualities. Moreover Criseyde does not die, but rather she parts from and betrays Troilus. This modification of the model contributes to the multi-

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<sup>23</sup> As Burnley points out, terms expressing multiple meaning acquire a precise significance depending on their collocation in the sentence and on the context. See J. D. Burnley, 'Chaucer's *Termes*', pp. 56–57.

<sup>24</sup> For the love scene as being the centre of the poem, see B. A. Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 223.

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levelled reading of the poem. Her being an unfaithful lover – after the lovers' union – renders her reprobable both as a courtly lover, and even more so as a woman.

So far two aspects have been identified: her unfaithfulness, and her belonging to two worlds. Firstly Criseyde's function as a betrayer is crucial. The role of the traitor is an ambivalent one. Whilst it is despicable for the very act of betrayal, without the traitor there would be no accomplishment for Troilus: there would be no sorrow, no death, no redemption and subsequent triumph. Traitors are essential within the tragic tales.<sup>25</sup> As to the second aspect, Criseyde shares her two-worldly nature with the Virgin Mary. Although Mary is Eve's daughter, she is Jesus's mother. Thus she unites earthly aspects and divine nature. For this innovation Chaucer has to undergo the god of Love's punishment and to write the *LGW*.

### The Christian Sub-Text

In addition to the religious terminology employed throughout the poem, there are other elements that could draw attention to Criseyde's ambivalence. When Pandarus asks her to yield her friendship to Troilus, Criseyde interprets Pandarus's request as a prayer (II, 453); Pandarus compares Troilus visiting her house to a man going to a temple (II, 372). Moreover, two expressions relate Criseyde to the spiritual world. First Pandarus asks what worth a gem is if it is without virtue, a herb without healing powers and 'Wo worth that wight that tret ech undir footel' (II, 347). The image of an angelic woman stamping something under her foot recalls the image of the Virgin treading on the snake, thus rescuing humankind from the devil's snare. Secondly when Criseyde looks at Troilus passing through the gate of Dardanus (II, 617-8) and

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<sup>25</sup> Here again *TC* can be juxtaposed with *NPT*, whose Narrator – albeit ironically – mentions exemplary betrayers: Ganelon, Judas, and Synon (*NPT*, ll. 3227-8).

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being acclaimed by the people, she asks: 'Who yaf me drynke?' (II, 651). The drink can be interpreted as a love potion, or as referring to an intoxicated state.<sup>26</sup> However, Criseyde's state points to a modified state of consciousness. In effect when she withdraws in her closet to reflect upon Pandarus's words, Criseyde is 'astoned' (II, 603). Then alone in her bedchamber Criseyde stupefied stares at Troilus and feels the state of inebriation expressed through the image of the drink. This can be paralleled to the state of the bride of the *Song of Songs* who is inebriated with the 'wine' of her spouse.<sup>27</sup>

Criseyde's humanisation and the physicality of the love union enable Chaucer to exploit the pivotal stage of narration further. The physical element provokes the transition from a possible symbolic level of narration to a realistic one. The religious aspect can thus be deftly concealed. The audience might be distracted into focusing on the more conspicuous aspects and overlook the possibility of further significance.

The undercurrent of the religion of the Christian God remains throughout the plot. Then it comes to the surface with the closing stanzas culminating in the final prayer to the Virgin Mary. Within the setting of the courtly lovers, Chaucer includes symbols by exploiting the ambiguity or double level of significance of the lovers' terms. He does not need to invent this, as the tradition of embedded Christian allegory was deployed in RR. It can be argued that behind the ambivalent terminology usually referred to courtly rules and concepts, Chaucer seriously points to the Christian religion too, although he is no mystic, and neither is Troilus.

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<sup>26</sup> See *Riverside*, p. 1033, n. 651.

<sup>27</sup> On the image of inebriation in pre-Christian and medieval mystical writing see Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, pp. 41-2. MED records the first secular use of 'dronken' in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, entry (3) 'filled (with love, joy, etc); elated; ecstatic; rapt'.



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In conclusion to this preface, to overlook the interpretation of the religion of Love<sup>28</sup> and of God could lead to only a partial understanding of the poem. Focusing on the more physical aspects of Troilus's 'aventure' may signify falling into Chaucer's snare of deliberate ambivalence. Only considering the replacement of the ethereal woman of Beatrice and Laura type, the seeming love union scene – apparently pointing earthwards – as the start of the fall, accepting Troilus's death as his end, would result in failing to notice the philosophical level of the poem.<sup>29</sup> In so doing the reader would be charmed, indeed 'ravysshed', by the poet's words into reading only at the level of the *littera*.

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<sup>28</sup> One could wonder what to be a love poet signifies beyond the literal meaning of the poet composing a love story between a man and a woman. Chaucer's poetic persona, a far cry from being a love poet, has been mainly read as a parody of his being inexperienced in love. For Chaucer as a naïf lover, as he only studied love in books, see D. Bethurum, 'Chaucer's Point of View as Narrator in the Love Poems', in *Chaucer Criticism, Troilus and Criseyde & The Minor Poems*, R. J. Schoeck and J. Taylor eds., vol. 2, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1960, pp. 211-31, p. 219; J. Lawlor, 'The Earlier Poems', in *Chaucer and Chaucerians. Critical Studies in Middle English Literature*, D. Brewer ed., London, Nelson, 1966, pp. 39-64, p. 48; A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 78, 83, 89, 102. However, this can be interpreted as his choice not to be (or his impossibility to be) a love poet, where love signifies ecstatic love for an angel-like symbolic woman whose tenor is kept concealed by the poet and has to be discovered by the audience. In effect the Italian poets referred to a woman as source of their poetry, and whose name discloses her symbolic function: Beatrice recalls bliss; Petrarch often employs puns involving Laura and l'aura; and Fiammetta is related to fire and a flame. The tradition of love for a symbolic woman can be traced back to the troubadours, see for instance D. de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. M. Belgion, New York, Schocken Books, 1990. Thus by declaring his not being a love poet could be Chaucer's admission that he does not belong to this tradition. In effect in his poetry there is no invocation to a woman who kindles his poetry, unlike in Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. This aspect of Chaucer and love would be worth expanding in a separate study.

<sup>29</sup> As Patch notices, Usk's comment on Chaucer's Troilus provides evidence of the philosophical content of the work: 'the noble philosophical poete in Englissh... in a tretis that he made of my servant Troilus [...]', Usk, *Testament of Love*, quoted in H. R. Patch, 'Troilus on Predestination', in *Chaucer, Modern Essays in Criticism*, E. Wagenknecht ed., Oxford University Press, 1966 [1959], pp. 366-84, p. 368. A few words are essential on the medieval term 'philosophical', as today poetry and philosophy occupy two clearly distinct realms. In the Middle Ages a philosopher was 'an intellectual with a complete knowledge of the culture of his time', see S. D'Agata D'Ottavi, 'Melancholy and Dreams in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Thou sittest at another booke...*, *English Studies in Honour of Domenico Pezzini*, ed. G. Iamartino, M. L. Maggioni, R. Facchinetti, Monza, Polimetrica International Scientific Publisher, 2008, pp. 209-221, p. 209. As Leyerle states 'the centrality of philosophical thought in his [Chaucer's] poetry has not been grasped, because the essence of his thought has been expressed in the highly creative form of a poetic nucleus', see 'The Heart and the Chain', p. 144. D'Agata D'Ottavi points out how the divide between the writing of philosophical treatises on human happiness, and on love, blurs with Dante's *Vita nuova*, and *Convivio*, and she stresses how Italian poets influenced Chaucer in re-elaborating the philosophical themes debated at the time into poetic forms. Moreover, since the thirteenth century the philosophical debate on love had extended to the discourse on human happiness and destiny, thus having an impact on the manner of writing love poetry, see S. D'Agata D'Ottavi, 'Melancholy and Dreams', pp. 210-12.

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### Duality

The double is one of the recurring motifs: the double sorrow of Troilus; the double 'visage' of words which refers to the double structure the poem is based on; the double function of characters; Pandarus as friend and weaver of the narration itself; the Narrator as intermediary between the authority of Lollius's book containing the story and the audience. Pandarus too is aware of the duplicity and of the value of contraries. How can happiness be known if sorrow has not been experienced? (II, 641-4). Knowledge derives from experience of the contraries, 'thus of two contraries is o lore' (II, 645).

Chaucer is aware of the power of ambivalent terms. He chooses Diomedes to voice a thought on the 'ambages': double words, or words 'with two visages' (V, 897-99). Words in themselves may have more than one meaning, and yet the image of the two 'visages' recalls humans, and their possibly ambiguous, therefore untrustworthy, behaviour. Significance of words – and the keeping of the word given – must have been one of Chaucer's focal concerns. The issue of the correspondence between words and facts appears in *CT*: 'wordes moote be cosyn to the dede' (*CT*, I, A, 742). Also in *Lake of Stedfastness* Chaucer regrets the time past when words corresponded to facts, and a person's word had the value of a promise, 'mannes word was obligacioun' (l. 2). Instead 'now it is so fals and deceivable/ that word and deed, as in conclusioun, Ben nothing lyk [...]' (ll. 3-5).

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### 4.3. *The First Structure - Troilus's Ladder*

The presence of religious components in *TC* is intense: Troilus's falling in love in the temple, the frequency of prayers,<sup>30</sup> the transformation from human love to divine love,<sup>31</sup> Troilus's spiritual growth and his final ascent.<sup>32</sup> These are usually associated with the religion of the God of Love that constituted a tradition dating back to the RR. In effect, the language of human and divine love, as well as that of feudal values, shares a common terminology.<sup>33</sup> At times even though the vocabulary is acknowledged as 'loves termes', that is to say technical terms and expressions pertaining to love as expressed by the higher classes, the two religions are considered as pertaining to two different domains to such an extent that 'love is apotheosized and demands a theology and a liturgy of its own'.<sup>34</sup> Consequently the numerous religious elements, in which *TC* is so rich, are not seen by critics as paralleled in the world of medieval mysticism. This section will show how the narrative structure of *TC* follows the ascending path of the medieval mystics, as has been seen in chapter 2. From this perspective, Troilus's final apotheosis and the Poet's final theological considerations, and prayer, acquire new resonance and may be read as a harmonic finale to the whole poem.<sup>35</sup>

The consistency of the use of religious terms and symbols forms a complete ascending cycle in the religion of Love and of God. Throughout the poem several specific phases can be identified when Troilus climbs towards his apotheosis. Within

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<sup>30</sup> B. A. Windeatt, 'Chaucer and the Filostrato', pp. 170, 177.

<sup>31</sup> Donaldson, *The Ending of Troilus*, p. 130; Farnham, 'Chaucerian Irony', pp. 208 ff. (see note n. 19 above).

<sup>32</sup> J. M. Steadman includes Troilus in the tradition of apotheosis, see J. M. Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972.

<sup>33</sup> Burnley, 'Chaucer's *Termes*', *YES*, 7 (1977) 53-67, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> Burnley, 'Chaucer's *Termes*', p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> See Curry, pp. 294 ff. More recently S. Manning maintained that the final is 'constructed a-logically', 'Troilus, Book V: Invention and the Poem as Process', *The Chaucer Review*, 18 (1984) 288-303, p. 294.

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each of these Chaucer employs the religious and also mystical register congruent with each stage in which Troilus dwells. Before commencing the analysis of the work based on the image of the ladder, it is essential to reiterate that in so doing there is no intention to turn either *Troilus* or his author into mystics in applying the structure of the ascending ladder path to Troilus's plight. It is acknowledged that the philosophical content of the poem aims to show how pagan Troilus errs in identifying his earthly love for Criseyde as the highest good.<sup>36</sup> Troilus looks downwards rather than aspiring to a greater eternal love.

The goal of this section consists in showing how the ascending hierarchical pattern elaborated by philosophers, theologians, and mystical writers is basic to medieval culture and how it can influence structural patterns of works of art, whether or not the author was a mystic. The comprehension and deployment of this pattern is one further element in the formation of a medieval poet who was extremely interested in the intellectual discourse of his time – one could argue that such patterns are present in his literary work. Although what follows is a general overview of the overall structure, the crucial steps are identified. A more analytical and all-comprehensive exposition would require a separate study. Here the focus lies on the principal moments when transitional states are described, and their relationship with the mystical techniques and experiences.

### **Book I – Conversion and Purification**

In Book I Troilus moves from an initial complete extraneousness to love, through several stages, to the definite 'conversion' (l. 999). He is first described as scoffing at

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<sup>36</sup> See S. Knight, *Ryming Craftily: Meaning in Chaucer's Poetry*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1973, p. 88; Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, pp. 68 ff.

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the young followers of the god of Love, unaware that the god will strike him too. Troilus sees Criseyde for the first time in the temple during the Feast of Palladion, a festivity that corresponds to the Christian Easter.<sup>37</sup> He is initially converted (I, 308) after being hit by the 'stremes' of Criseyde's eyes (I, 305); he feels the fire of love burning (I, 436; 440; 448); he loses sleep and refuses food (I, 484), and becomes ill (I, 489).<sup>38</sup> The following stages consist of Troilus's devotion (I, 555); his confession of his love through the utterance of his beloved's name (I, 874),<sup>39</sup> repentance (I, 934-5), and conversion (I, 999). This process can be summarised as in Table 1.

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<sup>37</sup> J. D. North, *Chaucer's Universe*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 369, North hypothesises that the date when Troilus first sees Criseyde is Easter Sunday 1385, see p. 393.

<sup>38</sup> For this behaviour considered as love sickness see Lowes, and Ciavolella, see footnote n. 20 above.

<sup>39</sup> Although this term is not mention here, it is employed by Pandarus speaking to Criseyde when summing up Troilus's behaviour in Book II, 528. Windeatt notices that Chaucer uses 'technical language of confession', *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 232; and in 'Chaucer and the Filostrato', p. 173. This dialogue between Pandarus and Troilus is a process towards confession, and is somehow similar to the process the Black Knight undergoes in *BD*.

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Table 1.

Lines	Main stages	Substages	Spaces	Transitional states
<b>Bk I</b>				
274			Temple	Astoned
316				Awhaped
308	Conversion			
357			Bedchamber	Alone
361-4				Awake- Mette
400				
422		Prayer to God of Love		
436				
440		Fire of love burns		
448				
489	Illness			
490		Fire of Love		T. wood for love
499		Tears		
543				P. arrives
547		Sick for sorrow and thought		
557		'Attritioun'		
579				
555	Devotion			
730		Lethargy		'Awake' P. says
871		Quaking before uttering C.		
874	Confession			
934	Repentance			
935-7		T. accepts to repent		
941		P. acknowledges T's tears		
979		'love of kynde'		
999	Conversion			
1000				
1012		Hotter love		
1036		T. tends to good no evil		
1080-1		T. becomes the best knight		

Initial conversion, illness, devotion, confession, repentance, and further conversion mark the pivotal passages to the following level. They mirror the initial stages of the mystical novices learning to master the control of their bodies and thoughts. Further, in each phase elements characterising the mystical experience can be identified. They are presented here below briefly, as they have already been explored in Chapter 2.

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### **Tears**

They represent a recurring element in the mystics' experience. Tears not only recall Margery's witnessing but they are acknowledged by Hilton and Rolle as physical evidence of progress of the ascent of the soul. Tears are also a shared experience by poets and writers, as is explored in the following section focusing on the relationship between poetry composition and *TC*.

### **Fire of love**

It is one of the first sensations of the mystics' experience, and one that is shared by mystics of all civilisations. As has been seen in the previous chapter, the fire of love occurs after the first stages devoted to the mastering of the body and thoughts. After practising the techniques aimed at controlling the body, mystics feel the fire of divinity. It can be expressed as fire, ardour, and heat.

### **Knot – Binding**

In *TC* the imagery related to the knot and the binding of Love is clearly exploited: from the initial state of Troilus feeling bound by love (I, 237; 255) to his feeling freer from it (II, 976); his will to let his soul free from the binding of the body, to his final triumph testifying that his complete freedom has been achieved.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Though the image of the knot has not been explored in ch. 2, it is fully part of the mystical experience. For a detailed analysis of the love-bond and the knot see W. Riehle, pp. 51-2. For Nature as force binding the creation see *PF*, pp. 163.

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### Pillars

As has been seen this symbol is known in all cultures and can be equalled to the tree, the ladder, and the column, all representing the means of communication uniting the human and divine worlds. It is an image common in mythological tales where the World Tree is closely related to dreams and visions experienced by shamans,<sup>41</sup> and it is a symbol in ecstatic experiences of various cultures acknowledged by anthropological studies of ecstatic shamanism (see ch. 2).

### Secrecy

From the very start Troilus's elaboration of his sorrow is accompanied by a sense of secrecy. It can refer to the feudal convention according to which a perfect knight keeps his love secret in order to maintain his beloved's reputation pure.<sup>42</sup> However, when analysed from the mystical perspective, Troilus's 'hidde sorwe' (I, 530) recalls the *prive* of the mystical encounter with the divinity which is reserved to the initiates (see p. 123). Pandarus too suggests Troilus should keep his love hidden and persevere in his service (I, 957-8) – where 'servyse' too is laden with religious meaning. Middle English 'servise' has the following definitions regarding the religious sphere: (a) normal life or conduct in conformity to God's will, piety, pious behaviour or activity; (b) special activity beyond what is normal in the service of God; (c) labour or activity undertaken in devotion to the Virgin Mary or to a saint. Depending

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<sup>41</sup> See for instance Odin's hanging from the World Tree as representing an initiating ceremony during which he undergoes a symbolic death. See H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, London, Penguin, 1988, pp. 144-5; on Yggdrasill, the World Tree, see pp. 26, 190 ff. Pillars appear in *PF*, see pp. 163, and in *HF* authors of the past are located on columns.

<sup>42</sup> Windeatt underscores the sense of secrecy and the association of the lovers' experience with religious terminology, 'Chaucer and the *Filistrato*', p. 169.



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on the context this term also pertains to courtly love; to chivalric deeds; and to sexual activity.<sup>43</sup>

### **‘Wrecche’ – ‘Labour’**

‘Wrecche’ is how Troilus defines himself when he is first aware of his condition, ‘swich wrecche as I ben wonne’ (I, 777). It defines a person ‘who is subject to misfortune or hardship, an unhappy creature, an unfortunate person’; someone who is poor in spirit; and something insignificant and worthless.<sup>44</sup> This is in line with the main theme of Fortune’s influence on human life, and with the fact that Troilus is at the bottom of the ladder amongst the followers of Love.

‘Labour’ is employed both by Troilus and Pandarus. It is one of the elements for which Troilus scoffs at the young lovers (I, 199), when he shows ‘no devotion’ (I, 187). Soon afterwards he thinks of Criseyde ‘whom I serve and laboure’ (I, 458). Since Pandarus’s appearance ‘labour’ refers to the aim of winning Criseyde’s love.<sup>45</sup> He first encourages Troilus to be patient or else their ‘labour is on ydel’ (I, 955), it is in vain. At the close of this Book he takes on this ‘labour’ (I, 1042) for himself to leave the ‘swetnesse’ (l. 1043) to Troilus. Both terms are employed by Margery Kempe, though long after Chaucer. All through the account of her experience she defines herself as ‘wrecche’. At the beginning of her work she speaks of her labour, which is referred to childbirth.<sup>46</sup>

To conclude, this Book leads to Troilus’s conversion into a follower of Love, but this is consistently represented in terms of mysticism. Although the initial stages could be

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<sup>43</sup> MED, ‘servise’, respectively 8 (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e).

<sup>44</sup> MED, ‘wrecche’, respectively 1 (a), (c); and 2 (d), (e).

<sup>45</sup> MED entry ‘labor’: ‘a task, a project’, 3 (a).

<sup>46</sup> MED definition 4 (b).

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labelled as love sickness they are soon overtaken by devotion, confession, repentance and conversion. These last stages confirm the ascensional movement of Troilus's soul. The concept of ascent is also provided by the image of Troilus climbing, 'is clomben on the staire' (I, 215).<sup>47</sup>

### Book II – What Love Is Not

Book II is mainly devoted to Criseyde and to her 'conversion' (II, l. 903) towards loving Troilus. Aspects of mystical love can be identified in Antigone's song. She declares that most people assume they know what love is. However, what they call love is not love. If one wishes to know what real love is, one should ask saints (II, l. 894). Further not all people are given the opportunity to know real love (II, 890-3). From Antigone's song it appears that despite the individual's will to achieve it, real love is subject to 'grace' (II, 827-31). This echoes the divine love that is yielded through grace to mystics. This would explain precisely why Troilus is the person who was selected by the god of Love: the god takes revenge on his scepticism and towards love. Troilus's experience recalls the instances when one a far cry from mystical life converts and undergoes higher levels of experience with greater ease than one who has been leading a devotional life for long.

When the focus of the narration returns to Troilus he declares he is an entire person, he is free, and his bonds have been broken, 'For I am hool, al brosten ben my bondes.' (II, 976). Subsequently Troilus, who is lying in bed, expresses his will to rise and to write a letter to Criseyde, 'I wil arise and write' (II, 1059), which can mark a further stage towards his ascent. The reference to rising is reiterated by Pandarus

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<sup>47</sup> In the following line the Narrator adds that he will fall, 'And litel weneth that he moot descenden' (I, 216). However, it is through his fall that Troilus will ascend to the eighth sphere.

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when he returns with Criseyde's letter: 'thow shalt arise' (II, 1313). Incidentally Criseyde's letter is mentioned as a 'charme' (II, 1314) containing the healing power for Troilus. This links with the 'ravisshyng' power of words expressed later by Troilus predicting that Criseyde will be charmed by Calkas; and to the power contained by a story if it is well narrated, as Pandarus shows in Book II.<sup>48</sup>

### Book III – Towards Ecstasy

The love union scene, the centre of the whole poem, represents Troilus's joy, after which his second sorrow commences. Reaching this joy, though, is not immediate. As for the other stages, it requires adequate preparation. This is the function of Pandarus's warning when he reminds Troilus of all their previous agreements: he sums up the path travelled so far (III, 239-343). After recalling that he has started 'for the a gamen pleye' (III, 250), Pandarus reiterates Troilus's duties in forms of prayer ('The preie ich'; III, 280; 'I the ofte preye', 285; 'my praier', 287): and he should keep the secrecy of the affair ('[t]hat privete go with us' III, 282; '[t]o holden secree swich an heigh matere', 286). He ends his speech first by stressing his truth to Troilus, 'For at thi day thow shalt me trewe fynde' (III, 333) and finally he announces to Troilus that he is now 'in blysse' (III, 342).<sup>49</sup> After casting up his look on Pandarus (III, 358) Troilus recalls his initial condition of distress, and trembling (III, 371), and he swears in the name of God who governs this world (III, 372-3) that he will not reveal this 'matere' (III, 370).

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<sup>48</sup> For the healing power of charms, see Anglo-Saxon see Davidson, *Gods and Myths*, pp. 113, 141, 156. See also J. F. Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times: Two Lectures Delivered before the Royal College of Physicians of London, June 23 and 25, 1903*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1904, pp. 94 ff.

<sup>49</sup> In this stanza the pronoun 'thow' is repeated five times in four lines. Windeatt notices a biblical parallel between Pandarus leading Troilus and Criseyde to bed together with the story of Jonadab who in the Old Testament helps Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam. 13. 1-20), *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 220.

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The preparation proves to be a long lasting process. Pandarus hides Troilus in a small chamber from where he can see Pandarus's guests coming for supper 'thorughout a litel wyndow in a stewe' (III, 600-1). The 'stewe' is a 'small room; closet'.<sup>50</sup> Why is Troilus enclosed in a room even smaller than his bedchamber in which the readers are used to seeing him? This can be paralleled to the cell in which the anchorites could attend the Mass through a small window. It was positioned so that the anchorite had a direct view on the altar without leaving their cell.<sup>51</sup> Moreover Troilus prays to Venus and the gods before meeting Criseyde (III, 715-35).

Only after withdrawing into a cell-like enclosed space is Troilus allowed to meet Criseyde. In her presence Troilus faints. Mann explains the swoon as signposting a mature and equal relationship between Troilus and Criseyde, where the lady's sovereignty is not threatened by male jealousy.<sup>52</sup> However, within the mystical progress it can be argued that Troilus's swoon consists of a further step towards the highest bliss: the overcoming of the ordinary awareness, a requisite to transcend to the ecstatic experience. Being similar to death, a faint expresses this transitional state. In the next stage, the union corresponds to ecstasy. Here again the ambivalent love terms refer to both human and divine love.<sup>53</sup> This ecstatic condition leads to the overcoming of sorrows towards bliss: 'out of wo to blisse now they flete' (III, 1221). The concept of bliss and further references to heaven (III, 1204, 1322) recurs in this

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<sup>50</sup> MED, entry 'stewe', 1 (c). On the use of 'stewe' in HF see p. 163.

<sup>51</sup> M. Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith*, London, Longman, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> J. Mann, 'Troilus's Swoon', in *Critical Essays on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and his Major Early Poems*, ed. D. Benson, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991, pp. 149-163, p. 150. Sanford B. Meech interprets Troilus's swoon as 'a demonstration of sensibility', though 'extravagant' too, see *Design in Chaucer's Troilus*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1969 [1959], p. 71. Windeatt stresses both the comic nature of the swoon as well as the submission of the lover. He also notices that soon afterwards Troilus is compared to a sparrowhawk reestablishing the masculine role. Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 226.

<sup>53</sup> P. Dronke highlights that the language of love echoes the language of Redemption. 'The Conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Medium Aevum*, 33 (1964) 47-52, pp. 50-1.

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Book. Terms like 'flete' (III, 1221), 'fle withouten wynges' (III, 1263), and Troilus's being in heaven (III, 1251) reinforce the achievement of the ecstatic state.

The exchange of rings between the lovers could point to a secret marriage.<sup>54</sup> Symbolically this may be read as the spiritual marriage experienced within ecstasy. In mystics' work, the spiritual marriage occupies the centre of the narration. That the union scene contains more than physical love is addressed by the Narrator's comment upon true love. Such perfection, he maintains, cannot be attained by any 'wrecce' (III, 1373), 'So perfit joie may no nygard have' (III, 1379), as what they call love is in contrast a folly or madness, 'Thei callen love a woodnesse or folie' (III, 1382). Therefore the audience is cautioned regarding the nature of love. Love, as perfect joy, is not available to everyone, thus anyone could be deceived when referring to it, as what is experienced by any 'nygard' could be insignificant. If the union is only read as physical consummation then the undercurrent beneath the literal would be missed. This concords with Antigone's view on love, as seen above (see p. 248).

Ecstasy brings Troilus into another dimension, changes him so deeply that he cannot readjust to ordinary reality. Once he returns to his physical dimension he feels qualities that he did not possess previously and that he cannot identify clearly

I not myself naught wisly what it is,  
But now I feelee a newe qualitee - (III, 1653-5)

Moreover, Troilus's perception of the world is reversed. His life without Criseyde is compared to death (III, 1483); in contrast to usual symbolism here day represents death, echoing Patristic writing according to which this life on earth is not the real

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<sup>54</sup> See J. Maguire, 'The Clandestine Marriage of Troilus and Criseyde', *The Chaucer Review*, 8 (1974) 262-78. Maguire also explains why Troilus cannot 'ravish' Criseyde (IV, 530) as Pandarus suggests, p. 275.

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life (see p. 160). Even though in the ecstatic state mystics are projected into a moment similar to eternity, where chronological time loses its value, ecstasy does not last forever. As mystics know well, assiduous as the search can be, ecstasy and the encounter with divinity cannot be attained at the individual's will, neither can it last at one's wish. It is always yielded by divine Grace, notwithstanding the rung of ascension attained (see ch. 2).

The ecstatic stage is further underscored by the Narrator's admitting he has no words to describe this joy (III, 1193; 1273), which in a mystical context corresponds to the ineffability of the experience (see ch. 2).

This is no litel thyng of for to seye;  
This passeth every wit for to devise

...

This joie may nought writen be with inke;  
This passeth al that herte may bythynke. (III, 1688-89; 1693-4)

To express the lovers' joy overtakes the human limits. So far Troilus has undergone all the stages from conversion, sickness to the spiritual marriage and the ineffable ecstatic experience. The rest of the poem illustrates how through the 'fall', Troilus rises up to the heavenly heights.

### Book IV – The Fall

Book IV, centred upon the lovers' parting, constitutes a further preparation towards apotheosis, although this last course of events is deemed (by the characters, the Narrator, and the audience) as Troilus's fall, or his second sorrow. It illustrates the loss of Criseyde and exemplifies Troilus's despair during a period that can be equalled to the divinity's withdrawal from the mystics. Troilus as depicted here recalls

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Margery's anguish when the divinity withdrew to test her, and for a period she was deprived of her visions.<sup>55</sup>

Troilus is depicted in his bedchamber, apparently likely to go out of his mind at the news of the exchange. In effect Pandarus finds that Troilus is in a 'traunce' (IV, 343) in his dark bedchamber. However, attention is drawn to the encouragement that both Pandarus and Criseyde address to Troilus to rise up (IV, 593; 645). Criseyde's last words to Troilus point exactly to Troilus's ascent: '[a]nd fareth now wel, for tyme is that ye rise' (IV, 1687). Troilus will not see Criseyde again. Some reflections on the verb used are relevant here. When Criseyde recovers from her swoon, the verb employed is 'abreiden', 'of swough therwith sh'abreyde' (IV, 1212).<sup>56</sup> Although both verbs 'risen' and 'abreiden' mean 'to start from sleep, recover from a swoon', 'risen' has the further significance of 'to rise from the dead, come to life again, be resurrected'. In effect 'abreiden' is used when Troilus awakes from a death-like state (I, 724) and from sleep (V, 520).<sup>57</sup> The connotation of the verb 'risen' may prove crucial in this phase.

## Book V – Transition

The rise leads to the final ascent. Several elements point to a sense of transition in this final part. In particular references to dreams and to the passage to death convey the sense of transition which imbues this last Book.

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<sup>55</sup> See Margery Kempe, chapter 4.

<sup>56</sup> Criseyde's fainting is not defined as swoon but rather as her spirit leaving its proper place (IV, 1152).

<sup>57</sup> *MED*, 'abreiden' 3 (a): 'to rise from sleep'. 'Risen' 2 (a): 'to rise from sleep, wake up'. 'Risen' 3 (a): 'to rise from the dead, come to life again; be resurrected'. It would appear that 'abreiden' is connected to physiological awakening, whereas 'risen' also has a figurative spiritual connotation, recalling a rising from figurative death to a new life.

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### Dreams

Troilus foresees his physical death by 'dremes'.

[...] I fele, by my maladie  
And by my dremes now and yore ago,  
Al certeynly that I mot nedes dye. (V, 316-18)

These lines give the opportunity to illustrate how Chaucer embeds the dream discourse within Troilus's 'aventure'. What does the term 'dremes' refer to? Although this is the stage where Troilus has his *somnium*, the oneiric vision of the boar still has to come. Here the term 'dremes' does not refer to a particular dream. Troilus can only define his condition subsequent to his ecstasy as 'maladie' (316) and 'dremes' (317). Given the reverse in perception, for Troilus this life equals illness, whereas the closer term expressing the almost mystical vision is still 'drem'. It points to a wider state of awareness which does not correspond to ordinary consciousness. This is consistent with the questions the lovers ask each other whether they were dreaming or living during the union: 'al this thyng but nyce dremes were' (III, 1342). They search for mutual reassurance by asking: 'Clippe ich yow thus, or elles I it mete?' (III, 1344). The contrast between reality and dream is expressed by the opening and closing verbs 'clippe' and 'mete', 'to embrace' and 'to dream' in the same line, conveying physicality and dream-like state.

In Book V Troilus refers to the 'hangover' of the ecstatic stage still utilising oneiric terms. '[D]remes' (V, 316) indicate the opposition of reality and the otherworld. What was an ecstatic, dream-like moment has become the state that Troilus wishes to conserve permanently, thus reversing the concepts of wakefulness versus dream. This is an instance where 'dreme' is employed as an umbrella term expressing a wider transitional state of awareness as opposed to the limited human consciousness



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characterising ordinary wakefulness. 'Dreme' is employed to define extra-ordinary experience. Visionaries would compare their ecstasy to a dream-like state (see ch. 2); theologians would include dreams in the classification of phenomena leading to knowledge (see ch. 1); 'dreme' is the technical term to define an otherworldly experience, in addition to the meaning of vision occurring during physiological sleep.

### Gates

The motif of the gate is crucial in the last part of the plot. Before his physical death Troilus revisits the earthly sites that have hosted his almost otherworldly experience. In front of Criseyde's palace Troilus feels his heart bursting in two and for sorrow he nearly faints, '...for sorwe adoun he gan to falle', (V, 532), he loses his hue – his paleness anticipates death, 'dedlich pale face' (V, 536). When he regains consciousness (V, 533), the fire of love has abandoned him, '[a]s frost, hym thoughte, his herte gan to colde' (V, 535). The frost he feels is mirrored by the lack of any access to the palace: windows and doors are locked (V, 531; 534). The palace that used to host Criseyde, the intermediary between Troilus and heaven, is now desolate (V, 540), empty (V, 542), and dark (V, 543). The lack of life turns the palace into a 'shryne' (V, 553) whose doors are cold, as the 'seynt' (V, 553) lives there no more. Approaching the end, Troilus recalls his *aventure* both spatially – revisiting the physical places associated with his love story – and mentally *à rebours* (V, 565-81), from the moment he last saw Criseyde to conclude with the beginning where he was first taken 'into grace' (V, 581). Even though the allusion to both levels of love can be put forward, the terms 'shrine', 'saint', and 'grace' indicate religious implications.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> M. McAlpine stresses that Troilus's attitude in front of Criseyde's door can be equalled to idolatry as opposed to eternal love as it should be, as Troilus's love is addressed to its own end rather than to an eternal aim. See M. McAlpine, *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1987, p. 127.

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Criseyde's door is not the last that Troilus faces and does not pass through before death. He goes up to the wall gate through which Criseyde, his 'blisse' (V, 607), rode away to the Greek camp (V, 603-4). It is a poignant contrast between Criseyde riding through the physical gate and her symbolising Troilus's 'blisse' and 'solas' (V, 607).<sup>59</sup> The wall gate of Troy delimits the space beyond which Troilus is not allowed as long as he is bound in his physical body.<sup>60</sup> However, there is an ultimate, challenging gate Troilus has to pass through: one that Chaucer manages to conceal between the lines.

### The Final Gate

Before proceeding beyond to eternity, Troilus still has to pass the ultimate trial, and he knows this. Chaucer, though, makes it almost indiscernible. Troilus anticipates this in the form of poetry. In *Canticus Troili* (V, 638) Troilus depicts himself as sailing towards death. In that journey if Criseyde's 'beams' do not guide him, he will be devoured by 'Caribdis' (V, 643-44). This can be read as a mere knowledgeable reference to classical mythology. Nonetheless it is hard to accept Chaucer's references as casual. At this stage the image evokes the trial of the final gate. The motif echoed here belongs to a long lasting mythological tradition shared by a number of civilisations. Scylla and Charybdis, two rocks in the sea near Sicily, echo the clashing doors, or Symplegades, through which the hero of legends, myths, and fables has to pass in order to reach the other world.<sup>61</sup> The image of the moving gate

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<sup>59</sup> 'Solas' is a 'two visages' word. It expresses joy, both physical, and sexual pleasure, and 'consolation, comfort; alleviation of sorrow; spiritual joy'. *MED*, 'solas' respectively 1; 2. The dreamer in *PF* searches for solace when he completes his circular path in the garden, see p. 163.

<sup>60</sup> Although criticism has stressed how enclosed spaces, be they the bedchamber or the walls, are frequent and they are linked to Troilus's own within, they have not been associated with the inner process of ascent present throughout the poem. As Barney notices, 'the walls are a borderline between ... the world of Pandarus and the bedroom, and the world of Diomedes and the field of battle.' S. A. Barney, 'Troilus Bound', *Speculum*, 47, (1972), 445-458, p. 457.

<sup>61</sup> For instances and the significance of the mythological *topos*, see Coomaraswamy, 'Symplegades', in Montagu M. F. Ashley ed., *Studies and Essays in the History of Science and Learning Offered in Homage to George Sarton on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday, 31 August 1944*, New York, Henry Schuman, 463-88.

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must have been well known to Chaucer who exploits it in the *HF* in the form of the whirling castle.<sup>62</sup> There the dreamer has to be carried by the eagle in order to enter, as the speed of the whirling movement is too fast for him. In contrast Troilus has no fear of facing death. When the hero is ready to confront the trial, he has nothing to lose, his advantage being his knowledge that human life is appearance as opposed to the real eternal life. The only moment in time and space when the hero can jump beyond into the otherworld is the instant when apparent oppositions in conception of time-space – time duration-eternity, beyond-within – are overcome.<sup>63</sup> Expressed in philosophical terms rather than mythological, it is the teaching that Lady Philosophy imparts to Boethius, and that is worth to be quoted in its entirety.

Whoso that seketh sooth by a deep thought, and coveyteth not to ben disseyvid by no mysweyes, lat hym rollen and trenden withynne hymself the lyght of his ynwarde sighte; and let hym gaderyn ayein, enclynynge into a compas, the longe moevynges of his thoughtes; and let hym techyn his corage that he hath enclosid and hid in his tresors al that he compasseth or secheth fro withoute.<sup>64</sup>

What appears as the most extreme outbound voyage, towards the beyond, is but a journey within, which corresponds in point of fact to what a dream is.<sup>65</sup> In *HF* the traveller into the beyond passes through two gates. In *PF* the golden gate has been deemed to represent the otherworld. As a threshold between states and between worlds, the door signals borders and boundaries. However, it also provides the

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A. B. Cook, *Zeus: a Study in Ancient Religion*, Vol. 3, *Zeus, God of the Bright Sky*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914, Appendix P., 'Floating Islands', pp. 975-1015, for Scylla and Charybdis as a type of Symplegades, see p. 976.

<sup>62</sup> Sypherd associates the whirling castle with Symplegades, see W. O. Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame*, New York, Haskell House, 1965 [1907], pp. 173 ff.

<sup>63</sup> Coomaraswamy, 'Symplegades', pp. 481 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Boece, III, m. XI, pp. 436-7, in *Riverside*

Quisquis profunda mente vestigat verum  
Cupitque nullis ille deviis falli,  
in se revolvat intimi lucem visus  
longosque in orbem cogat inflectens motus  
animumque doceat, quicquid extra molitur,  
suis retrusum possidere thesauris; [...]

Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae*, III, m. XI, O. Dallera ed., Milano, BUR, 2005, p. 248.

<sup>65</sup> In this last paragraph the use of the male pronoun is not intended as gendered. At this level of significance the hero symbolises the human soul. The choice for the pronoun 'he' has been made in order to keep consistency as the argument here centres on Troilus.

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possibility to overcome the same boundaries and borders by means of rituals and preparations.<sup>66</sup> They are both material openings leading into a sacred space – as the Easter rites in front of the church gate are described in Margery's Book for instance – and symbolic transitional passages to a further ecstatic stage, as witnessed by mystics. The ultimate gate is the one from which one cannot return. Troilus's Caribdis echoes the clashing doors separating this from the netherworld. Once passed through his Caribdis, Troilus rises to the heavenly spheres, from earthly to eternal, real life.

### **4.4. THE SECOND STRUCTURE: NARRATIVE FRAMEWORKS**

The oneiric imagery as employed in the dream visions has been interpreted as the poet's transition from ordinary awareness to a poetic trance. In the previous section *TC* has been explored from the perspective of the mystical journey towards ecstasy. This section explores how Chaucer illustrates the act of poetry making. Although *TC* is not framed in a dream, there are some precise instances in which Chaucer turns to oneiric imagery conveying the significance of transitional states towards poetry making. The present section investigates the theme of poetry-making embedded in the narrative. It reveals several frameworks centred on the love of Troilus and Criseyde, Pandarus, the Narrator, and the Poet, who each take turns in weaving the narration. Identifying four frameworks in Chaucer's *Troilus* is not arbitrary. It is grounded in the tradition of the exegesis of the holy text. Moreover, these are the reflections upon the 'process' of narration expressed within his dialogue with Criseyde in Book II. The influence of Boethius's *Consolation* provides further evidence of a fourfold narrative framework, as each voice finds correspondence to a

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<sup>66</sup> On the rites of passages, see A. van Genneep, *Riti di passaggio*, Torino, Boringhieri, 1981, ch. 2.

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level of knowledge as recognised by Boethius. Alongside entertaining the audience with a love plot, Chaucer explores themes that concern him more: free will, predestination, truthfulness. To these, poetry composition and the Poet's 'dremin' should be added.

### Frameworks, Voices, and Poetry Composition

After exploring how Troilus's triumph is consistent within the mystical progress perspective, four narrative frameworks can be identified: the lovers' plot; Pandarus; the Narrator; and the Poet. At each level the speaking voice confronts aspects of the process of poetry composition, and at different levels Pandarus, the Narrator, and the Poet contribute to the making of the narrative with the lovers' plot as their centre. Within the structure based on several narrative frameworks it will be seen that the final stanzas are congruent with the rest of the poem.

Criticism agrees on the complexity of the poem, which encompasses multifarious layers with related multifaceted meanings.<sup>67</sup> Although some critics tend to perceive that the poem is construed on a double structure, their opinions diverge: a horizontal and another vertical structure would underlie the poem;<sup>68</sup> a linear and a circular;<sup>69</sup> an outer and an inner frame;<sup>70</sup> and two houses.<sup>71</sup> The fact that Chaucer's contemporaries considered *TC* as a philosophical poem and Chaucer a philosophical poet would confirm such complexity (the full implications of the term 'philosophical' are discussed at p. 239).<sup>72</sup> As Windeatt points out 'the design of *Troilus* can educate its

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<sup>67</sup> Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 299.

<sup>68</sup> Jordan, 'The Narrator in Chaucer's *Troilus*', p. 238.

<sup>69</sup> A. Barney, 'Troilus Bound', p. 458.

<sup>70</sup> M. W. Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination in *Troilus and Criseyde*', repr. in *Chaucer's 'Troilus': Essays in Criticism*, ed. S. Barney, London, Scolar Press, 1980, pp. 75-90, p. 84.

<sup>71</sup> Manning, 'Troilus, Book V', p. 290.

<sup>72</sup> '[T]he noble philosophical poete in Englissh', T. Usk, *The testament of Love*, III, ch. IV, ll 559-60, <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/uskfram3.htm>> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> July 2010]. References to Usk's quotation can be found in H. R. Patch, 'Troilus on Predestination', p. 368. See also B.

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reader to see a wholeness in the poem distinctively different from the expectations of unity brought to a text by a modern reader'.<sup>73</sup>

Not only the structure and the ending have triggered a prolonged debate. After the Narrator has been identified as a character,<sup>74</sup> hypotheses concerning the network of relationships amongst characters have been varied: the Narrator has been compared with Troilus;<sup>75</sup> and he has been seen becoming the Poet.<sup>76</sup> Pandarus has been paralleled to Chaucer;<sup>77</sup> to Lady Philosophy;<sup>78</sup> and to the devil.<sup>79</sup> Also those critics whose focus is not centred on the Narrator as a character appear to sense that there is a tension in the final part of the work. Donaldson speaks of an 'emotional storm-centre which causes the narrator's various shifts and turns in his handling the ending'.<sup>80</sup>

The complexity of the poem has encouraged studies to face single issues individually – themes, structure, speaking voices (Narrator and Poet). In contrast, to gather the three issues together regarding the structure, the narrative voices, and poetry composition illustrates that these three main threads intertwine throughout the narration of Troilus's woe. In this section it will be argued that the structure and the speaking voices are interrelated. Moreover, in addition to the themes confronted in the poem – love, truthfulness, free will and predestination – Chaucer includes the

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Windeatt, 'Chaucer and Filostrato', p. 176; Leyerle, 'The Heart and the Chain', p. 144; B. L. Jefferson, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy*, New York, Gordian Press, 1968 [1917], p. 130.

<sup>73</sup> Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 299.

<sup>74</sup> See Jordan's article 'The Narrator in Chaucer's *Troilus*'.

<sup>75</sup> Bloomfield maintains that the Narrator and the hero tend to merge in Book IV and V, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 86; J. Frankis, 'Paganism and Pagan Love', in Mary Salu ed., *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 57-72, p. 64.

<sup>76</sup> Manning referring to art 'as doctrine and discipline' maintains that when the Narrator understands the theme of his work, then he becomes like a poet and their voices are one, *Troilus*, Book V, p. 291.

<sup>77</sup> Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 89, n. 14.

<sup>78</sup> Jefferson, p. 124.

<sup>79</sup> D. W. Robertson, 'Chaucerian Tragedy', *ELH*, 19 (1952) 1-37, p. 17 also compares him to a devil's priest.

<sup>80</sup> Donaldson, 'The Ending of *Troilus*', p. 121.

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topic of poetry composition through oneiric imagery. Once the narrative voice is identified, a narrative framework is recognisable too. Chaucer builds the poem on four levels: the inner plot; Pandarus; the Narrator; and the Poet. At each narrative phase the relative narrating voice contributes to the unfolding and to the progress of the narration at a superior level that requires a wider awareness of knowledge for its comprehension.

As to the structure, two main narrative frameworks have been identified by Bloomfield: the inner story made up by 'the helplessness and the turmoil of the lovers', and the wider framework 'of the present and in the panorama of complete knowledge'.<sup>81</sup> As the issue of knowledge is linked to predestination, Bloomfield maintains that the outer frame is 'another level of the story'.<sup>82</sup> However, this other level is not matched with a narrating voice or as a structural framework. Secondly, as to the narrating voices, Jordan's seminal study identifies the Narrator as one of the characters. He also acknowledges the different awareness in knowledge between Troilus, Pandarus, and the Narrator and relates them to Boethius's hierarchical theory of perception leading to knowledge.<sup>83</sup> Finally criticism has acknowledged Chaucer's awareness of poetry composition.<sup>84</sup> It is precisely the relation between the writing process as depicted in the text with the other two threads – the structure and the narrative voices – that can shed further light on the interpretation of the poem.

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<sup>81</sup> Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 84.

<sup>82</sup> Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 84.

<sup>83</sup> Jordan, 'The Narrator in Chaucer's *Troilus*', p. 257, n. 12 refers to Boethius's four levels and relates them to the narrator, the author, and God. However, he does not consider Pandarus as a possible level of narration.

<sup>84</sup> Rowe noticed that *TC* is 'a poem about poetry', quoted by S. Manning, 'Troilus, Book V', p. 288. R. Burlin maintains that 'in all of Chaucer's poetry one perceives a consciousness of the fiction-making process that must be taken into thematic account', R. S. Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 29-30.

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### The Inner Plot – Troilus's 'Ymaginacioun'

The analysis can start from the inner plot and move towards the wider frames: from Troilus's *aventure* to the final voice of the Poet. The Narrator makes it explicit from the outset that the purpose of the poem is to sing Troilus's love (I, 3), and he exhorts readers to read Dares (I, 141-1) if they wish to know more about the war. Troilus is mainly depicted within enclosed spaces:<sup>85</sup> as has been seen above (see pp. 166 ff.) the enclosed place is appropriate both for poets – who concurrently are lovers – and contemplatives, as it represents the individual being in touch with their own within. It is in this situation that the poet sees the appearance of an authoritative figure. When Troilus falls ill with the love malady, he sends all his household away, to ensure that he is alone, lies down on his bed and makes 'a mirour of his mynde' (I, 365) through which he can see Criseyde:

That, as he sat and wook, his spirit mette  
That he hire saugh a-temple, and al the wise  
Right of hire look, and gan it newe avise.  
Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde  
In which he saugh al holly hire figure  
And that he wel koude in his herte fynde. (I, 362-7)

These lines reveal Troilus's state of consciousness. He is wide awake when he 'mette'. The oneiric vision he saw therefore is not a dream in the modern sense. Then he commences to make a mirror of his mind within which he sees the woman in her figure. Troilus can find this in his heart, the symbol of the within, as he is in touch with his inner part. Criseyde's 'figure' (I, 366) can be read both as her beauty and as a symbol, as is employed in the dream of the boar (Book V, 1449).<sup>86</sup> After resolving to keep his love secret, 'he wolde werken pryvely' (I, 380), so Troilus, the fierce knight,

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<sup>85</sup> See Barney, 'Troilus Bound', pp. 457 ff.

<sup>86</sup> MED, 'figure', 1 (a): shape, form, appearance: (a) visible or tangible shape or form; general appearance; 3 (a): Something having symbolic significance, symbol; significant sign or example.



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composes his first song, *Canticus Troili*, inspired by Petrarch.<sup>87</sup> How does Troilus achieve his first poetic composition? He composes by means of withdrawal from the world, and intense inner concentration on an image – a technique employed by the mystics particularly in the period of Passion preceding Easter.<sup>88</sup> At this stage Troilus does not know whether Criseyde is ‘goddesse or womman’ (I, 425). She is defined as ‘aungelik [...] lik a thing immortal semed she’ (I, 102-3). In addition to recalling a type of gloss of the narrator-translator to render the sense of ‘aungelik’, the expression stresses Criseyde’s immortal, eternal nature.<sup>89</sup> Troilus composing poetry echoes the poet of the dream visions.

Earlier Troilus is defined as ‘astoned’ (I, 274). The stupefied knight is described alone in his bedchamber, expressing his complaint aloud; he refuses sleep, food, and suffers from love sickness (I, 484-90). It is then that Pandarus initially appears (I, 548) and ‘herde hym groone’ (I, 549). If considered from the perspective of states of awareness Pandarus’s appearance can be paralleled to Boethius’s Lady Philosophy.<sup>90</sup> The term ‘astoned’ referring to Troilus corresponds to Boethius ‘obstupuit’ which Chaucer translates with ‘abaysshed and astoned’.<sup>91</sup> It is worth recalling the concept conveyed by the term ‘stupor’ as explained by Dante (see p. 149).<sup>92</sup> Jefferson draws the parallel between Troilus and Boethius on the base of Pandarus’s reply. However, further to Pandarus’s words, through Troilus Chaucer depicts how *ymaginacioun* works

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<sup>87</sup> On Chaucer’s misunderstanding of Petrarch, see E. H. Wilkins, ‘Canticus Troili’, *ELH*, 16, (1949) 167-73.

<sup>88</sup> See Glasscoe, *Games of Faith*, p. 24.

<sup>89</sup> OED first record of the term ‘angelic’ dates back to 1485 (Caxton, St Winifred). *MED* records the entry ‘aungelik’ in this line of Chaucer’s *TC* (1385) and in Lydgate’s *Troy Book* (1425).

<sup>90</sup> Jefferson notices the parallel between Troilus and Boethius who complains against Fortune, p. 124. Pandarus echoes the words uttered by Lady Philosophy to comfort him.

<sup>91</sup> See Jefferson, p. 37. *Boec*, I, pr. I, l. 81, p. 398.

<sup>92</sup> On Chaucer’s knowledge of Dante’s *Convivio* see J. Livingston Lowes, ‘Chaucer and Dante’s *Convivio*’, *Modern Philology*, 13, (1915) 19-27, where Lowes refers to passages from the fourth Treatise of *Convivio* being echoed in various passages in *HF*, to *Complaint of Mars*, and to *LGW* which echo Dante’s *Convivio*.

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and how a first stage of composition can be achieved: withdrawal into the bedroom; mirror of the mind; concentration on an image; appearance of guiding figure.<sup>93</sup>

### **Pandarus – Oneiric Phenomena and Poetry Composition**

Regarding the four levels through which a text can be interpreted – be it secular or religious (see p. 156) – Pandarus represents the second level. In the following section the significance of oneiric phenomena related to Pandarus are analysed, and then his connection with poetry composition is explored (see p. 267). Two oneiric phenomena remain to be discussed: Pandarus's oversleeping prior to starting his 'grete emprise' (II, 73), and Criseyde's dreaming of Pandarus three times the night before he arrives in her palace. The latter can be deemed an evident case of synchronicity also for the medieval mentality, so much prone to view the world in terms of harmony and subtle correspondences between creatures, and between human beings and wider creation.

### **The Swallow and the Nightingale**

The Narrator weaves the scene describing Pandarus in his bed and Proigne singing, sure that his audience would associate Proigne with the swallow from the Philomela story. Although Pandarus's experience is not evidently a dream – neither is it defined as such – his slumber while Proigne is singing her sorrowful lament is essential to the unfolding of the plot. In effect when she laments how Thereus took her sister with violence, Pandarus awakes (II, 64-70). It is then that he starts the engine of the plot. This recalls very closely the poet in his bed (see pp. 166 ff.). In the previous stanza Pandarus is in bed in distress for love (II, 57) and then a 'voice' heard through a window arrives at the poet's ear. This episode is essential both for the

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<sup>93</sup> On the length of time between Troilus first falling in love and Pandarus's appearance see Provost, *The Structure of Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde'*, Anglistica, vol. 20, Copenhagen, Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1974, p. 39. Provost maintains that Pandarus appears in April a year after Troilus's falling in love.

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commencement of the plot and within the perspective of narrative structure of the poem. This broaches to the second interpretation of Pandarus's function within the concentric frameworks of the poem that are explored below (see *Pandarus and Composition*, p. 267).

Pandarus's awakening and starting 'his grete emprise' (II, 73) complements Criseyde's condition later in the same Book. After hearing Antigone's song, Criseyde is lying in her bed, when a nightingale sings a song of love that infuses in her good 'entente', and she is won over by sleep. The swallow and the nightingale are part of the same legend (though the nightingale is turned into a male bird). Whereas the swallow sings a sorrowful song to Pandarus about her sister, the nightingale sings a love song; Pandarus awakes and commences his plot, while Criseyde falls asleep and dreams. Both birds' singing marks a turning point in the narration: Pandarus commences his mission of bringing Troilus and Criseyde together; Criseyde gradually accepts Troilus's love – as the Narrator stresses that her love increases by stages (II, ll. 666–679).<sup>94</sup> Two considerations can be made. Firstly it could be argued that a kind of communication between the lines of the text is being performed between Pandarus and Criseyde by means of their dreams. While Criseyde's first dreaming of Pandarus is neutral, as she wishes '[t]o goode mot it turne' (II, 90),<sup>95</sup> her second dream complements Pandarus hearing Proigne. For Pandarus the Narrator speaks of Proigne directly, whereas for Criseyde he chooses the generic name of nightingale, avoiding the direct reference to the raped Philomela. Chaucer may have chosen this for two main reasons. First Pandarus sides with Troilus openly, and manipulates Criseyde to that aim. Secondly it can be argued that Chaucer is aware of the issue of rape in the narrative and in the historical setting he chooses as context.

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<sup>94</sup> For the time structure see Provost, ch. 3, pp. 34–52.

<sup>95</sup> This recalls the invocation in the Proem of *HF*, ll. 1; 58.

**'Ravisshe'**

Pandarus's plot could be interpreted as Criseyde being subject to a degree of violence. Chaucer makes sure that the idea of rape is absent from the audience's immediate perception, even though Pandarus manipulates her and convinces her to have Troilus as her lover. In order to avoid any hint of rape of Criseyde, she herself has to show that she is not an object of violence. Hence two fundamental elements: Criseyde's dream aims to assure the audience that the exchange of hearts was painless; secondly before the union with Troilus, Criseyde declares that she has already yielded to him, or else she would not be there (III, ll. 1210-1).<sup>96</sup> In this scene too Chaucer turns to similes with birds: the lark grasped by the sparrow-hawk (III, ll. 1191-2). The bird's imagery forms a subtle network around the characters and their mutual connections that extends into Criseyde's dream.

Chaucer's awareness of the issues of rape also emerges when he deftly plays with the multiple meanings of 'ravisshe'. Troilus admits that the war was caused 'for ravysshyng of wommen so by myght' (IV, 548). The same verb is used by Troilus when considering Criseyde's departure from Troy. When addressing Criseyde Troilus foresees that Calkas 'ravysshen he shal yow with his speche' (IV, 1474). The alternative is that Calkas makes Criseyde do what he wants 'by force' (IV, 1475). Troilus knows that it is possible to persuade Criseyde, as this is what he and Pandarus have plotted. This demonstrates that Pandarus has 'ravysshed', charmed, Criseyde into loving Troilus with his words. Further the verb is employed by

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<sup>96</sup> M. Lambert notices that the audience is not told exactly when this happened. There are similar scenes occurring in front of the reader and it is not easy to identify when exactly an episode has occurred, *'Troilus, Books I-III: A Criseydan Reading'*, pp. 118-9. However, Criseyde's yielding to Troilus occurs in her interiority.

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Pandarus when he suggests Troilus should 'ravysshe' her (IV, l. 530). In so doing Chaucer exploits the various levels of significance of the verb 'ravishen'. The cause of the war is the rape of women. Calkas's words would charm and carry Criseyde out of her wits, and bend her will to his. Finally taking Criseyde away could be a solution for Troilus's despair.<sup>97</sup> Chaucer avoids the risk of Criseyde being an unaware victim of violence also through her dream. Criseyde's unconscious feeling emerges in her dream by means of the image of the eagle.

Nonetheless there is also the implicit ravishment operated by Criseyde on Troilus. Troilus's transformation throughout the poem represents ascent to ecstatic bliss, 'ravishment', possible through Criseyde's yielding her love. However, here again Chaucer has introduced a twist. Whereas Criseyde 'ravishes' Troilus to heaven – both earthly and divine – she is 'ravished' by Pandarus's words. While Troilus is granted an eternal place in the heavenly spheres, Criseyde – the angel-like creature in the temple – is first transformed into a woman loving Troilus. Further she is destined to eternal 'hell', condemnation in literature as the epitome of female betrayal.

### Pandarus and Composition

Though being related to both Lady Philosophy and to Chaucer,<sup>98</sup> Pandarus has not been associated with a level of narration. And yet, when his appearance and behaviour are carefully considered, one can see that further to being a manipulator of persons and controller of facts, whose power strongly hints at the use of magic, he is the originator of the unfolding action.<sup>99</sup> His magic proves to be close to the poet's art

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<sup>97</sup> See *MED*, 'ravishen', respectively 2; 3; and 1.

<sup>98</sup> See footnotes 77, 78 above.

<sup>99</sup> On the relationship among characters E. D. Kirk states: 'TC is a story about a man (the narrator) creating a poem about a man (Pandarus) creating a love affair for a man (Troilus) who is creating the woman who makes it possible', E. D. Kirk, "Paradis Stood Formed in Hire Yën": Courtly Love and Chaucer's Re-Vision of Dante', in *Acts of Interpretations: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in*

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of conjuring up characters and events. Through the analysis of Pandarus's conversation with Criseyde and the employment of the term 'process', Pandarus is related to composition. Here again the theme of literary composition is intertwined with the discourse of truth and falseness, and with the poetic language. The following aspects will be investigated: the employment of the term 'process', and the conversation between Pandarus and Criseyde. Within these in particular two of Pandarus's statements are touched upon: his charging Troilus's death to Criseyde, and his description of Troilus's composing a complaint in a garden.

Criticism has acknowledged the relationship of Pandarus with rhetoric. Pandarus himself refers to rhetoric when he mentions the 'subtyl art' (II, 257) by which it is possible to convince the listener that Janus is the symbol of 'rhetorical ambiguity'.<sup>100</sup> Chaucer allocates the rhetorical simile drawn from Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* to Pandarus.<sup>101</sup> Since his return home Pandarus ponders upon the construction of the house (I, 1065-1071), 'in his herte thoughte/ and caste his werk ful wisely or he wroughte' (I, 1070-1). Before starting he considers his work carefully.<sup>102</sup> Subsequently he is described in his bed, between wake and sleep and his awakening is accompanied by the swallow singing (II, 64-70). His first thought is for the 'grete emprise' (II, 73) he has to fulfil for Troilus, and as the moon is positive he can start his 'viage' (II, 75).<sup>103</sup> This scene resonates with the opening of a number of dream visions: in his slumber Pandarus hears a voice from outside the window that narrates the sad story

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Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson, M. J. Carruthers and E. D. Kirk eds., Norman, OK, Pilgrim Books, 1982, pp. 257-277, p. 264.

<sup>100</sup> Bumley, 'Termes', p. 63.

<sup>101</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, in *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle: recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du moyen âge*, E. Faral ed., Paris, E. Champion, 1958, I, 43-47, p. 198.

<sup>102</sup> MED, 'casten', 21.

<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, in addition to 'journey' (definition (a)), MED entry 'viage' has the meaning of 'spiritual journey towards heaven' (def. (c)), as well as 'enterprise' (definition (d)). MED, entry 'emprise' has as meaning 1. 'an undertaking', and 2. 'a chivalric enterprise'.

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of Proigne. The setting closely recalls the poet in Machaut's *La fontaine amoureuse* (ll. 70 ff; 199 ff).<sup>104</sup> The stages Pandarus undergoes echo those followed by medieval poets towards composition. Pandarus's slumber, his hearing the nightingale's song from outside the window, and his 'entente' to build the house all point to the figurative idea of composition. The stage preceding poetry-making is represented by the poet's slumber. Here Chaucer depicts a poet in third person, following the stages the medieval audience was familiar with: Pandarus in his bedchamber, his 'grete emprise' (l. 1171), and his 'viage', a spiritual journey, can be read as his composition of the love between Troilus and Criseyde.

### The 'Process'

The term 'process' is employed twenty-five times in Chaucer's work, of which twelve are in *TC*. Here its frequency is particularly marked in Book II and III.<sup>105</sup> The elevated occurrence of 'process' is not casual as it is in these two Books that Pandarus's narrative role takes place. Although Barney notices the connection between Pandarus's 'process' and his language, he does not relate this to Pandarus as a narrator. Pandarus's process is referred to as a machination rather than a narrative plot.<sup>106</sup> Although Pandarus maintains that he is not employing the 'subtyl art' (II, 257), Criseyde is aware that his speech is not familiar, but rather it is 'peynted'. Here the Poet-Chaucer reveals how to structure a story, how to narrate it and how to make it suitable to the audience. In making Pandarus's thoughts heard, a short treatise of narrative technique is made available too. Pandarus declares that since 'th'ende is every tales strengthe' (II, 260), he will not make his explanation long. Pandarus thinks

<sup>104</sup> G. de Machaut, *Le livre de la fontaine amoureuse*, ed. J. Cerquiglini-Toulet, Paris, Editions Stock, 1993, ll. 70 ff; 199 ff. For an analysis of the influences of Machaut on *TC*, see J. I. Wimsatt, 'Guillaume de Machaut and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Medium Aevum*, 45 (1976) 277-93.

<sup>105</sup> Barney, 'Suddenness and Process in Chaucer', *The Chaucer Review*, 17 (1981) 18-37, p. 32.

<sup>106</sup> Barney, 'Suddenness', pp. 32-3.

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in terms of composing a tale, 'my tale endite' (II, 267; 257). From line 268 (II) the term 'tale' is employed interchangeably with 'proces'.<sup>107</sup> Pandarus concludes that the process should not be long (or else Criseyde feels that she is being deceived) and should be adequate to the listener, 'hire wit to serven wol I fonde' (II, 273). In both Pandarus's mind and in his speech to Criseyde, this passage deals with composing and telling a story. Indeed the frequency of terms belonging to the semantic field of narration in nine stanzas (II, 253-315) is remarkable: 'tale' (257; 260; 267; 305; 308) 'endite' (257; 267), 'proces' (268; 292); 'telle' (310; 315).

At the conclusion of this sequence, Criseyde urges Pandarus to speak, as she is both afraid and longing to know – evidence that Pandarus' technique has been successful in arousing her interest. Having drawn his niece's attention Pandarus utters: 'now herkeneth! I shall telle:' (II, 315). Pandarus concludes with a formula recalling the beginning in the tradition of oral story telling, demanding silence and the utmost attention. This confirms the commencement of Pandarus's 'emprise'.

### Troilus's Death and his Composing in the Garden

Two details strike the audience: the possibility that Troilus and Pandarus himself will die and Criseyde would be deemed responsible for their death; secondly Pandarus's reference to Troilus composing a complaint in the garden near the fountain. Within the context of composing and story telling, what at first could sound like blackmail

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<sup>107</sup> It is noteworthy that in Book II the term 'proces' is used six times (ll. 268; 292; 424; 485; 678; 1615), and 'endite' eight times (13; 257; 267; 700; 886; 1024; 1061; 1162). In the other Books the incidence of employment of 'proces' is as follows: Book III three times; Book IV once; Book V twice. Moreover in Book III (1739) 'proces' is employed as referred to *Canticus Troili*, 'and swich a proces make | [...] It was an hevene his wordes for to here' (ll. 1739-42). It can also be recalled that 'processus' was one of the parts into which sermons were structured, see J. Davidoff, *Beginning Well: Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry*, Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988, p. 33.



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by which Pandarus endeavours to frighten Criseyde (that Troilus's life is in her hands (II, 322) and that both Pandarus and Troilus will die (II, 323; 327)), can in contrast be read as the possibility given to fictional characters to continue living in the narrative world. If Criseyde accepts her role, and is friendly to Troilus, he will not die. He will live in the world of literary narration, and so will Pandarus.

Pandarus's speech intertwines truth and trustworthiness. A number of terms pertaining to these fields are employed: 'feythfully' (263), 'bigyle' (270), 'wyle' (271), 'deceyven' (285), 'good entencioun' (295), 'I lye' (300), 'trist', 'trewe' (306).<sup>108</sup> It is evident that the themes of composing and story telling, truth and deception appear side by side. This recalls the discourse on truth and falsehood debated by medieval poets and theologians (see p. 155). The second aspect concerns Troilus composing in the garden, in Pandarus's version. Although Pandarus declares his good 'entencioun', when his niece asks whether Troilus can speak of love, Criseyde and the readers are presented with a scene where Troilus is composing his complaint in a garden near a fountain. That sounds new to the readers too, although their awareness is wider than Criseyde's, as this scene does not appear in the previous narrative.

How can this be interpreted? The audience is left to wonder whether it is true. On one hand Pandarus is anything but true, as he was not with Troilus, and Troilus was not by a fountain in a garden whilst he composed the complaint the audience heard. It can be the variation of the motif of the overheard complaint, as this was a common motif in love poetry – and Pandarus did happen to overhear Troilus when he first arrived (I, 549). Two characters in a garden with a fountain recall Machaut's

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<sup>108</sup> These are employed in seven stanzas. Within them a remarkable occurrence of terms related with Fortune and truth are present: 'fortunate' (280), 'fortune' (285), 'cas' (285), 'aventure' (281; 288; 291). These six terms occur in fifteen lines (ll. 280-294).

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*Dit de la Fontaine amoureuse*.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand from the perspective of poetry composition this scene is revealing when interpreted not literally but rather figuratively through the imagery of sleep. Troilus lying in his bed, 'astoned', signifies he was in a transitional state other than the ordinary awareness, though not asleep; the state in which poets envisage their poetic imagery – and the contemplatives visualise their religious imagery. The garden is the poetic space where the poet-dreamers find themselves at the beginning of their oneric journey, once they have achieved a state of 'stupor', they are 'astoned'. Therefore this is not so much a lie from Pandarus as a 'translation', a transformation into poetic images of Troilus's state during Pandarus's appearance to him: the state appropriate for composition. Troilus was indeed expressing a complaint aloud (I, ll. 547). In his turn, within this framework Pandarus is acting like a poet transforming reality into poetic matter.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover the manner in which Pandarus synthesises the stages Troilus underwent would confirm that Pandarus's version is true. In Pandarus's words Troilus was addressing the god of Love and repenting:

Now, mea culpa, lord, I me repente!

'O god, that at thi disposicioun  
Ledest the fyn by juste purveiaunce  
Of every wight, my lowe confessioun  
Accepte in gree, and sende me swich penaunce  
As liketh the, but from disesperaunce,  
That may my goost departe away from the,  
Thow be my sheld, for thi benignite. (II, 525-32)

Troilus repents, acknowledges the divine providence, prays in order that his confession is accepted, and asks for penance. These are stages that in effect have occurred in Troilus's growth within the first Book by the time Pandarus leaves his

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<sup>109</sup> See also *Riverside*, p. 1033.

<sup>110</sup> On the similar figurative translation of Augustine's illumination represented as occurring in a garden, see p. 150.

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house. Therefore is Pandarus a liar? Or rather is he translating from real facts into poetic imagery? Or else is he a visionary who can foresee a future scene? In effect later on Troilus is in a garden when he composes another *Canticus*. More specifically it is said that Troilus and Pandarus would quite often go to the garden where Troilus would 'a proces make' (III, l. 1739) so wonderfully that his words were heaven to hear. The 'proces' within this context refers to Troilus's *Canticus*. Poets can ornament a narrative, as Pandarus does when mentioning the garden and the fountain; they also can foresee future scenes providing their previous statements with a prophetic tone.<sup>111</sup> Thus this is not a simple debate on whether or not Troilus and Pandarus were in a garden. This entails the discourse on the role of the poet as a visionary, or a liar telling 'fictions', from 'fingere' (see p. 154). Certainly the poets' conception of the time of the narrative is different from that of the audience, who are unaware of the future developments. It also leads to the conception of time perceived from a wider perspective that recalls Lady Philosophy's solution to the opposition between free will and predestination. Philosophy explains that God's conception of time is eternity, the opposition being such only from the limited human perspective of successive points in time defined as past, present and future.<sup>112</sup>

In conclusion, Pandarus's aim is to construct a narrative in which the characters come to life by living within the inner plot. He exploits his rhetorical and narrative skills to make them live. He employs the skills of rhetoric and of oral story telling – 'Harkeneth!' – and deploys the art of transforming literal, factual event into poetic imagery. Pandarus' relation to poetry composition can be further confirmed by one of the meanings of the term, which also has two 'visages', a secular and a religious: 'a

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<sup>111</sup> See Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, p. 66, who underscores that the Narrator's prayers sound prophetic, as they come true.

<sup>112</sup> *Boece*, Book V, pr. 6, *Riverside*, pp. 466 ff.

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narrative discourse, an orderly narrative; a story or historical account; a book of the Bible'.<sup>113</sup>

### Pandarus's Limits

Pandarus faces some limitations in his action. This becomes evident in the central scene of the lovers' union. Troilus faints; Pandarus intervenes freeing him of his clothes and putting him to bed with Criseyde. As if this was not enough, he remains in the room<sup>114</sup> to settle the candle on the fireplace and then he admonishes the fierce knight not to faint again. One cannot fail to deem the scene as comic. What is Pandarus's function? His role as a shuttle bringing together the characters and weaving the narration has been successful: Pandarus has reached his 'entente' (III, 1582). Troilus and Criseyde are one, as he had stated in his speech with Criseyde (II, 587). However, as has been shown above, the union represents the crucial moment of Troilus's encounter with the divine. Here Pandarus can only step back, remain on this side of the curtain, but not beyond. By the power of poetry the poet can push the characters there where he cannot access. Similarly in the end Troilus reaches where the Poet cannot in this life. The curtain hides the mystery of the union, of the divine encounter, as it is not accessible to anyone.<sup>115</sup> It signposts the threshold beyond which those who are not yielded the 'call' cannot trespass.

Finally Pandarus's role and skills reach the end when he cannot do anything more for Troilus. The 'ende' of his 'emprise' is achieved, and he leaves the thread of narration to the Narrator. As Burnley remarks 'ende' is an ambiguous term. However, here it

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<sup>113</sup> MED, 'proces' 3 (a).

<sup>114</sup> G. Brenner notices that it is not said explicitly that Pandarus leaves the room, 'Narrative Structure in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', in S. Barney ed., *Chaucer's Troilus: Essays in Criticism*, pp. 131-144, p. 133.

<sup>115</sup> On the veil that used to divide the altar from the rest of religious temples and churches see R. Wheeler, *The Medieval Church Screens of the Southern Marches*, Woonton, Almeley, Logaston Press, 2006, pp. 9 ff.; 23; 32.

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refers to the 'dénouement of plot or the purpose of narrative'.<sup>116</sup> Pandarus reveals his 'ende' to Criseyde being Troilus and Criseyde become one (II, 587). Pandarus expresses his limits when he exits from the narration: after asserting his hate for Criseyde, he states: 'I kan nomore seye' (V, 1743). In both cases it is the verb 'seye', the impossibility to speak, that characterises Pandarus's limits. Pandarus withdraws leaving the stage entirely to the Narrator.

### The Narrator

Even though at times silent, he has been present from the opening. Like a guide he introduces each book, indicating how to read them.<sup>117</sup> In so doing he has become a persona by the time the audience accesses the third Book.<sup>118</sup> As Pandarus connects the characters like a shuttle – weaving the inner plot – so the Narrator liaises the different events and decides how to unveil them to the audience. The Narrator's role is relevant throughout the poem and he makes the audience aware of his presence.<sup>119</sup> The audience's response and involvement depend very much on his interventions or his silences.<sup>120</sup> By making his voice heard he takes the audience back to their present reality so that they can have a detached, wider perspective of the plot. The audience shares with the Narrator a sense of superiority over the characters, as he has unveiled Troilus's destiny and Criseyde's unfaithfulness. They can observe from outside, acquiring near god-like omniscience.<sup>121</sup> But also, by means of his silence the audience

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<sup>116</sup> Bumley, 'Termes', p. 63.

<sup>117</sup> See Knight, *Ryming Crafty*, p. 77.

<sup>118</sup> See Knight, *Ryming Crafty*, p. 89.

<sup>119</sup> Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 77.

<sup>120</sup> See Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 78; Jordan 'The Narrator', p. 247-8.

<sup>121</sup> See Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, p. 79, who maintains that there are things that the audience, and God know that Troilus does not.

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becomes extremely involved in Troilus's plight.<sup>122</sup> Further to being an intermediary between audience and inner plot, the Narrator stands between the audience and the author's story – the story he wishes us to believe he is following and by which he is constrained. He wants the audience to think that he cannot change the plot, although he does modify Boccaccio's version of the story.<sup>123</sup> Here again, at a deeper level of reception, the Narrator proves he might not be completely sincere. Although he plays the role of the historian relating the historical events of Troy,<sup>124</sup> the Narrator reports his own version of Troilus. He makes his choice clear from the opening stage: he will narrate Troilus's plight as a lover; those who wish to hear about the war are recommended to read other authorities. However, the Narrator does not change the basic skeleton of the plot probably because as a historian he wishes to remain faithful to the source.<sup>125</sup> Equally probable is that his poem has a 'fyn' to achieve: Troilus has to die, having suffered with the sorrow caused by earthly love; Criseyde has to accomplish the role of the unfaithful in its entirety. Furthermore the Narrator, being at a less elevated stage than the Poet is constrained by the overall intention of the Poet.

The Narrator as intermediary is located within the text as an integral part of it. He takes the stage from Pandarus and keeps it until the Poet's voice is heard. In the last part of the poem the two voices are not clearly distinguishable.<sup>126</sup> Critics hold various views as to the speaking voice: the Narrator becomes the Poet because he learns by

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<sup>122</sup> See Jordan, 'The Narrator', p. 248, according to whom the audience becomes 'emotionally wrought up and clearly involved' when Narrator is silent during Troilus's waiting for Criseyde. See also Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 78.

<sup>123</sup> See Windeatt, 'Chaucer and the *Filostrato*', pp. 164 ff.; also C. S. Lewis, 'What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*', [1932] repr. in Benson ed., *Critical Essays*, pp. 8-22.

<sup>124</sup> See Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', pp. 77-8.

<sup>125</sup> Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 76.

<sup>126</sup> Knight, *Ryming Craftily*, p. 93.

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telling the story;<sup>127</sup> because they both are concerned with poetry.<sup>128</sup> There is no doubt that the voice heard from the beginning and in each prohemium is the Narrator's. It is also clear that the *envoi* (V, 1786-99) separates the end of action from the ending of the poem.<sup>129</sup> The *envoi* is soon followed by Troilus's death, his ascent, and the retraction of the pagan values so far illustrated.<sup>130</sup> It could be argued that the Narrator's voice concludes for a first time soon before the *envoi*. The address 'Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,' (V, 1786) is likely to be uttered by the maker of the tragedy.<sup>131</sup> The main difference in the Narrator's and the Poet's role is that the Narrator can be any narrator, story-teller in any point in time (history) and space, who has an audience willing to listen to the story orally, whereas the Poet is that one individual who has established his version of the story and therefore wishes that the scribes make no errors.

After parting from his 'litel bok', more important still for the Poet is that his creation is understood, and for this purpose he prays to God (V, 1798). These concerns regard the Poet more closely than the Narrator. The following four stanzas (ll. 1800-27) could be spoken by the Narrator again. However, the last six stanzas consisting of two groups of three,<sup>132</sup> form a unity uttered by the Poet, who definitely takes the centre stage. He retracts the pagan values that have been illustrated so far, and invites the 'yonge, fresshe folkes' to cast up their glance to God the creator. The gesture of looking up recalls Troilus who 'up his eighen caste [...]' (I, 726) when Pandarus first

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<sup>127</sup> Frankis, 'Paganism and Pagan Love', p. 71.

<sup>128</sup> Manning, 'Troilus, Book V', p. 299. He also puts forth the poet's addressing the scribe, p. 298.

<sup>129</sup> Knight, *Ryming Craftyly*, p. 90. See also Jordan, 'The Narrator', p. 253.

<sup>130</sup> See Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, p. 144.

<sup>131</sup> On the genre of *Troilus* see D. Brewer, 'Comedy and Tragedy in *Troilus and Criseyde*'; see also M. McAlpine, *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde*.

<sup>132</sup> Knight, *Ryming Craftyly*, p. 92.

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appeared.<sup>133</sup> The Poet also exhorts people to head to the real 'hom' (V, 1837) echoing Lady Philosophy's words to Boethius who had lost his 'countree' when he was in despair.<sup>134</sup>

### The Poet

The Poet represents a level of awareness wider than the Narrator. He locates himself in history by addressing Gower and Strode.<sup>135</sup> By identifying himself as a medieval poet with values other than pagan, Chaucer moves beyond Troilus's limitations.<sup>136</sup> However, setting himself in historic reality is a double-edged sword. On one hand it offers the advantage of salvation by means of the Christian mysteries of the Trinity and of Passion (V, 1863-4), as Bloomfield stated.<sup>137</sup> On the other hand historicity sets the poet back within human limits. Albeit the creator of poetry, he is provided with a type of omniscience above the events that he composes, he yields his protagonist an opportunity that Chaucer himself as a man does not possess: Troilus's glance down to earth from eternity. The twist that Chaucer has given to the narration (see p. 228) re-establishes the limited human condition of the Poet as well as of the audience. As both audience and Poet are out of the narrative framework, Troilus's glance and laughter make them return to the reality where the soul is prisoner of the body. Troilus's laugh is headed to those who mourn him, those whose love is not directed to eternal love. It is also addressed to the readers of all time, who are subject to Fate, Fortune, Destiny, and who debate on free will and predestination. Troilus's tragedy on earth and his final glance from above push readers back into the awareness of

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<sup>133</sup> Also in other moments Troilus looks up at Pandarus. See for instance III, 358. This gesture can also recall the dreamer in *HF* in the desert before the appearance of the Eagle.

<sup>134</sup> *Boece*, I, pr. 5, ll. 9-11, p. 405; V, pr. 1, l. 15, p. 457. Jefferson, pp. 111-3, recalls the reference to Boece in the *Romance of the Rose*, ll. 5657-66. Knight, *Ryming Craftibz*, p. 91, notices that this line has 'a greater stress than the preceding lines'.

<sup>135</sup> Jordan, 'The Narrator', p. 254.

<sup>136</sup> Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 86.

<sup>137</sup> Bloomfield, 'Distance and Predestination', p. 86.



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their *condition humaine*. What Troilus and Chaucer both share is the immortality they have gained through the tragedy: in the fictional and the literary world respectively.

The Poet apparently remains out of the fictional narrative framework until his voice is heard at the conclusion: the whole poem is imbued with his presence, as he is its creator. The final prayer is the synthesis the Poet finds between opposites that are such from the limited human perspective. Whilst the Narrator shifts the audience's perspective from within the plot back to reality, the Poet brings them back definitely to the reality of individuals with human limitations. The audience is located, then, in the outer frame together with the Poet who leads to the final prayer and recalls human finiteness with respect to the eternal forces. The technique of bringing the audience gradually back to the reality in which they live echoes the conclusion of the *NPT*, where at the very end the Priest's voice emerges. Moreover both narrators conclude with a forewarning against falsehood in life: the Priest against flatterers within the court, whereas in *TC* the Poet warns the ladies against traitorous men (V, 1780-85).

The fact that the real conclusion comes after the second *envoi* signifies that 'Chaucer prized highly the real end'.<sup>138</sup> The final prayer ends significantly with the image of the Virgin Mary as 'mayde', and as 'moder [...] benigne' (V, 1869): firstly because the poem so centred on sexuality can be balanced by recalling the image of Mary the 'mayde',<sup>139</sup> secondly the prayer to Jesus's mother leads up 'towards heaven through human experience'.<sup>140</sup> Finally after disclaiming responsibility for the evil things

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<sup>138</sup> Knight, *Ryming Craftily*, p. 93.

<sup>139</sup> Knight, *Ryming Craftily*, p. 95.

<sup>140</sup> Donaldson, 'The Ending of *Troilus*', p. 130.

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declared about women, it can be argued that Chaucer the Poet reaches out a hand to the female counterpart of the protagonist of the poem.

### The Four Levels of Knowledge

After identifying two possible structures underlying *TC* – the one construed in form of a ladder, and the four narrative frameworks – one might wonder why Chaucer would build such a complex structure. The influence of *De consolacione philosophiae* is acknowledged by critics, as Chaucer wrote *TC* whilst or soon after translating Boethius's work. It would not be surprising then if in addition to pondering upon the themes that most concerned him, Chaucer decided to follow a Boethian model concerning the levels of knowledge. In this construction Troilus would represent the first level of knowledge acquired through the 'wit', the senses. He can go as far as conjuring up Pandarus and visualise 'fantasie' in his solitude. In effect Pandarus underscores Troilus's state and his visions are the result of his *ymaginacioun*, or *fantasie* (V, ll. 261; 329; 358; 372-3; 454). Medieval *ymaginacioun* operates on the sense data formed by images (see p. 179).<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, being drawn towards human love for Criseyde takes him towards the level of senses.<sup>142</sup> At the second level Pandarus whose awareness is wider than Troilus's corresponds to the 'will'. This is 'the intellectual faculty to seek whatever he perceives as good'.<sup>143</sup> Above Pandarus is the Narrator, who stands for 'resoun' that 'analyses the universal features from images created by *ymaginacioun*'.<sup>144</sup> Finally the Poet, who can perceive theological truths corresponds to the level of 'intellect'.<sup>145</sup> Lady Philosophy identifies 'sensus'; 'imaginatio'; 'ratio'; and 'intelligentia', which are rendered into Middle English by

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<sup>141</sup> Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition*, p. 105. On imagination see also K. Reichl, 'Chaucer's *Troilus*: Philosophy and Language', in P. Boitani ed., *European Tragedy of Troilus*, pp. 133-152, pp. 139-146.

<sup>142</sup> Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, p. 73.

<sup>143</sup> Burnley, *Chaucer's and Philosophers' Tradition*, p. 105.

<sup>144</sup> Burnley, *Chaucer's and Philosophers' Tradition*, p. 105.

<sup>145</sup> Burnley, *Chaucer's and Philosophers' Tradition*, p. 105.

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Chaucer as 'the wit of the body'; 'ymaginacioun'; 'resoun'; and 'intelligence'.<sup>146</sup> Jordan briefly mentions the four levels of knowledge in the *Consolatio*, but he does not associate them with the different levels of narration and frameworks structuring the poem: as to awareness of knowledge he considers the narrator, the author, and God.<sup>147</sup> In *TC* the Narrator guides the audience within the plot and back to reality again. The Poet is acknowledged as the final author of the literary work. Rooted out of the text he is the one who has the control of the work.

The narrative frameworks providing the different depths of significance contribute to the tectonic structure of the poem which echoes the house that Pandarus pondered upon (I, 1065-71). The rhetorical image has become a multi-levelled literary construction. The parallel between architecture and rhetoric has been acknowledged.<sup>148</sup> What is relevant is that the image of the house as a symbol of narration is shared in theological writing and in rhetoric. Rabanus Maurus compares the story to a house of which he identifies four levels that are formed in the soul. The story provides the foundations; allegory builds the walls; anagogy settles the roof; and tropology paints the ornaments.<sup>149</sup> The four levels of interpretation of a text are valid both in theological and in rhetoric/secular writing (see pp. 155 ff.).

From this perspective it is evident that considering the poem's theme as a love affair between man and woman<sup>150</sup> and interpreting that in the central love scene the

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<sup>146</sup> Boece, V, pr. 5, ll. 23-42, p. 465.

<sup>147</sup> Jordan, 'The Narrator', p. 257, n. 12.

<sup>148</sup> See M. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought, Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 16 ff.

<sup>149</sup> Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam*, PL 112, col 849. 'In nostrae ergo animae domo *historia* fundamentum ponit, *allegoria* parietes erigit, *anagogia* tectum supponit, *tropologia* vero tam interius per affectum quam exterius per effectum boni operis, variis ornatibus depingit.'

<sup>150</sup> See for instance F. A. Payne, *Menippean Satire*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, p. 88, who maintains that *Troilus* mainly focuses on 'the love of man and woman'. M. McAlpine, *The*

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narrator focuses ‘understandably on the ecstasy of the sexual union’, and that he ‘revives his romantic inexperience’<sup>151</sup> proves to be seriously limited. One would wonder why Chaucer would make the material he was working on so complex if it was a mere love story. This could be satisfying as an interpretation focussing on the first level of the story, the *littera*. Eschewing to proceed beyond the ‘historia’, in Rabanus’s words, would result in overlooking the depth of the poem as well as neglecting the structural complexity of the construction.<sup>152</sup>

To consider *TC* in its profundity would bring to the fore the mirroring of microcosm and macrocosm so central in the medieval mind. The Narrator and the Poet are the key-players of the game of cross-reference between planes. As has been seen through the Narrator’s silences and interventions the audience is shifted from a position of involvement in the unfolding of the plot to the vantage position of near omniscience. The Poet – belonging to the outer frame as the audience – asserts his and the audience’s vantage situation yielded by living in the historical Christian era. Nonetheless Troilus’s glance from the height of the heavenly spheres reminds the audience of their mortality by relocating them in their physical historical reality: the limited *condition humaine* given by the soul being prisoner within the body. From the limitedness of the earth the audience, like the Poet, can only aspire to eternity and to the bird’s view down to the earth, whereas the Poet can achieve this state during his visionary creative moments, as occurs for instance to the dreamer guided by the Eagle and African.

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*Genre*, p. 116, maintains that the theme in *TC* is not the rise and fall of a great prince but love. However, she does not specify what kind of love it is.

<sup>151</sup> McAlpine, *The Genre*, p. 129.

<sup>152</sup> Windeatt underscores the ‘layers of significance’ in relation to the variety of genres included in the poem. See ‘Classical and Medieval Elements in Chaucer’s *Troilus*’, in *European Tragedy of Troilus*, pp. 111-131.

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The two structures identify both influences from the mystical intertext and Chaucer's awareness of the poetry-making discourse. The ladder-like progression explains Troilus's ascent to the eighth sphere paralleling the mystics' ecstatic journey. The second illustrates the Poet's creative power. Pandarus and Troilus achieve creation through a transitional process conveyed by oneiric images (Troilus in his bedchamber and in the garden; Pandarus within a slumber). Similarly, even though *TC* is not framed in a dream, one could venture that the Poet has undergone the poetic trance too. In effect the four levels of narration with Troilus at the centre and the Poet creator as ever-present figure echo the levels of knowledge theorised by philosophers: from the sense up to the Poet's wider awareness, from *Wit* to *Intelligentia*. Although Chaucer does not strictly follow the stages expected in a dream vision – the poet in his bedchamber, his 'drem' – here he introduces the reader directly to the voice of the Narrator, the figure that in his previous works was voiced by the dreamer, and this new relationship between voice and text will develop profoundly in later works, as will be indicated in the following chapter.

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Lines	Main stages of Troilus's progress	Spaces	Transitional states	Composition	Boethius four levels of Knowledge
<b>Bk I</b>					
274		Temple	Astoned		
316			Awhaped		
308	Conversion				
357		Bedchamber	Alone		
361-4			Awake- Mette	<i>Canticus Troili</i> from Lollius	
489	Illness				
490			T. wood for love		Tr: Wit – <i>sensus</i>
499					
543			Pand. arrives		
555	Devotion				
874	Confession				
934	Repentance				
999	Conversion				
<b>Bk II</b>					
60-77				Pand.'s slumber	
903	Conversion				
1305			Tr: trance Pand. arrives		Pand.: Will – <i>Ymaginacioun</i>
<b>Bk III</b>					
601	Preparation to the union	Stewe with window			
698		Pand. unlocks the stewe's door			
1092			Tr's swoon		
1221			Bliss		
1251	Tr. in heaven				
1273					
1744-71				Tr's Hymn to Love (from Boethius)	
<b>Bk IV</b>					
343			Tr's trance		
355			Pand. enters Tr's chamber		
651					
1170-6				Tr's Complaint	
<b>Bk V</b>					
638-44				<i>Canticus Troili</i> from Bocc. [V, 62-6]	
1233-53			Tr's dream of the boar		
1743				Pand. 'I kan no more'	Narr: <i>Ratio</i>
				Retraction	Poet: <i>Intelligentia</i>

Table 2 - Troilus's progress together with the acts of composition, and Boethius's levels of knowledge.

## Chapter 5 – Towards *The Canterbury Tales*

*TC* represents an intermediate stage in Chaucer's narrative development. From the structure of the early dream-visions influenced by the French and Italian poets, *TC* broaches the more complex structural framework of the *CT*. Through the dream-vision frame the poet ponders upon his own narrative patterns. In dream visions, dream and narration tend to coincide, and Chaucer explicitly refers to the dream and to the poem interchangeably. Indirectly the oneiric frame provides the poet with the opportunity to reflect upon the process of poetry making. In *TC* this reflection is less evident, nonetheless it is present. Here there are remnants of the dream-vision technique: Troilus in the solitude of his bedchamber, and Pandarus's appearance following the guise of Boethius's vision are aspects of the dream-vision framing of the narration. As has been seen (see p. 263), Troilus conjures up his friend Pandarus following the medieval poets' creative process: withdrawal into the bedchamber, lack of sleep, appearance of dream imagery still follow the stages of the contemplatives in their cells. However, in *TC* the narrative structure becomes more complex and layered. The Narrator is both character and intermediary between the two worlds: of fiction and of the audience's reality.

### *The Legend of Good Women*

*LGW* could be viewed as the work where Chaucer tackles the collection of tales, the justification of it being the penance he has to undergo because of his previous writing against women. The result is a collection of monothematic tales united under the oneiric framework, although in this case the relationship between oneiric prologue and the tales appears thinner. *LGW* is the link between dream and variety

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of tales. The Prologue is an integral part of the transition to the CT, although it has been considered as a 'regression' to the dream vision form.<sup>1</sup> However, the narration-within-narration structure is not forgotten. On the contrary, it has been assimilated and a new seed germinates. The fourfold level of narration is maintained and applied to a collection of tales. Further to the structure of the work itself, it would be revealing to pursue the significance of the poet's intention:

For myn entent is, or I fro yow fare,  
The naked text in English to declare (LW, G, ll. 85-6)

The poet's intention is 'naked'. S. Delany has shown how the term conveys polysemic and contradictory significance: it communicates poverty of meaning because of deprivation of adornment; simplicity of vernacular; and referred to Holy Writ the lack of glosses.<sup>2</sup> Possible relations between Chaucer's 'entent' and the way the term is employed in a mystical context would be worth exploring. 'Naked' echoes the *Cloud*-author's voice 'for it suffiseth inough a naked entent directe unto God',<sup>3</sup> where 'naked entent' relates to the movement of the will ascending towards God, whilst depriving itself of influences from the senses and the thoughts.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> R. Worth Frank, *Chaucer and The Legend of Good Women*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> S. Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994 <<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft9h4nb69s/>> pp. 118-120 [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2010]. Delany remarks that 'nakedness' also conveys a positive note as to simplicity and honesty, together with the opposing of poverty and deprivation, pp. 121-122. On implications on the expression 'naked text' related to the Wycliffites, and on the use of the verb 'declare' in religious contexts, see H. Phillips, 'Register, Politics, and the Legend of Good Women', *The Chaucer Review*, 37 (2002), 101-128, pp. 110-111.

<sup>3</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. 7, l. 497. P. J. Gallacher ed., originally published in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1997 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/cloufrm.htm>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009]

<sup>4</sup> See R. K. Forman, 'Mystical Experience in the *Cloud*-Literature', in Glasscoe M. ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium IV: papers read at Dartington Hall, July 1987*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1987, 177-194, p. 182. It is worth remarking that in the *Cloud*, 'nakid' is employed twelve times (ch. 3, ll. 289-90, ch. 5, ll. 1447-8, ch. 7, l. 497, ch. 8, ll. 565-6, ch. 9, l. 616, ll. 624-5, ch. 10, ll. 633-4, ch. 24, ll. 1063-8, ch. 25, l. 1097, ch. 34, l. 1298, ch. 43, ll. 1539-40, ch. 44, ll. 1544-5, 1547-8), of these 'naked' is referred to 'entent' five times. Forman relates 'nakid entente', repeated twice in ch. 24, ll. 1063-3, to *The Book of Privy Counseling* 'loke □at no□ing leue in □i worching mynde bot a nakid entent stretching into God, not clo□id in any special □ou□t of God', quoted in Forman, p. 182. In *Scale of Perfection* Hilton employs 'naked' numerous times, and Julian relates the concept to the nakedness of the soul, ch 7, l. 179; to the meditation on sin, ch. 11, l. 450; and to the term 'sin', ch. 27, l. 941, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, G. Ronan Crampton ed., originally published in *The Shewings of*



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relationship between 'nakedness', the text, and mystical visions could also be found in the concept put forth by some theologians who found a correspondence between the senses of the reading of the Holy Writ and the degrees of vision.<sup>5</sup> An investigation of *LGW* would also draw the researcher's attention to its being conceived as a palinode, as a penance for the poet's previous writings.<sup>6</sup> This element joins *LGW* more closely to *TC* and *CT*, in that they present an epilogue and the retraction.

### *The Canterbury Tales*

The Poet turns to the Narrator-pilgrim-character again to guide the audience in *CT*, but this time not through one story nor by one Pandarus-character. This time Chaucer multiplies the 'game', and the Narrator is able to depict a variety of 'Pandaruses': the pilgrims heading to Canterbury. The monothematic collection of tales of *LGW* develops into the variety of voices of the pilgrims in *CT*. The four-level frame is conserved: Chaucer-Poet, pilgrim-Narrator, individual pilgrim-Pandarus, voices-tales. The *CT* are at the same time the synthesis and the expansion both of the *LGW* – a monovoiced and monothematic collection of tales – and *TC*, from which Chaucer retains the complex fourfold narrative structure. Readers constitute the fourth framework linked to reality. Without recipients, stories would not come to life for failure of listeners. They would not be mirrored in a reader's mind.

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Julian of Norwich, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1994 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/julianfr.htm>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009]

<sup>5</sup> See G. Padoan, 'La "mirabile visione" di Dante e l'Epistola a Cangrande', in Padoan G., *Il pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse. Tradizione classica e intendimento medievale in Dante*, Ravenna, Longo, 1977 pp. 30-63, p. 57, n. 85. Padoan quotes Garnier de Rochefort who refers to the last degree of vision as 'ascensu mentis et excessu nude et pure' [through the ascending and the ecstasy of the mind purely and nakedly], p. 57, n. 85.

<sup>6</sup> F. Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, ch. 8, 'The Palinode'.

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When stepping into the world of *CT* within the discourse of dreams it is hardly possible not to touch upon the *NPT*, at least briefly. *NPT* presents the themes emerging in the works so far explored: in addition to the dream debate, knowledge and foreknowledge of the future events, and falsehood versus truth are implied in the narration. After investigating Troilus's plight, it could be argued that *NPT* represents the almost symmetrical opposition of Troilus's world, in that the plot here is immersed in physicality. Chauntecleer is asleep and he is having a physiological dream. His being depicted in a fenced yard, through the poet's irony, recalls a fortress where the protagonists provided with courtly behaviour are, in reality, fowls.<sup>7</sup> The mock-heroic setting commences the depiction of the reversed world. The garden enclosed by a wall into which one is only permitted through a symbolic gate is here a yard where the only characters provided with a name are the farm animals, and where the flattering traitor hides among the cabbages. A few aspects are sufficient in order to outline what could be defined as Chauntecleer's ravishment to reality or, to paraphrase from *TC*, the double bliss of Chauntecleer.

### The Double Bliss of Chauntecleer

In order to comprehend Chauntecleer's 'aventure' one can follow his movements from the perches, to the yard. As his 'aventure' is governed by Fortune (l. 2999), it appears to follow the circular movement of its Wheel.<sup>8</sup> For him the movement is

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<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the irony in the opening of the tale, see S. Knight, *Ryming Craftily*, Sidney, Angus and Robertson, 1973, pp. 212 ff.

<sup>8</sup> There is a close association between 'aventure' and 'fortune' and it is said that they rule together, 'As was his aventure or his fortune, | That us governeth alle as in commune' (l. 2999). Further 'aventure' is employed at the beginning of the story when the narrator states that he will 'telle his [Chauntecleer's] aventure' (l. 3186). Two significant meanings of 'aventure' are: 'a tale of adventures, an account of marvelous things', and 'fate, fortune, chance; one's lot of destiny', *MED*, entry 'aventure', definitions 6; 1.a; respectively. Chauntecleer's 'aventure' is considered as definition n. 6, 'a tale of adventures'. The circular movement of Fortune's Wheel and the theme of joy are anticipated in

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between the top of the 'bemes' and the ground in the yard, and at the conclusion of the adventure from the fox's jaws to the refuge of the tree (l. 3417). Several verbal hints at his movements to and from the beams are made throughout the tale. When Chauntecleer is first described, he is dreaming on a 'perche' (l. 2884) and the debate on dreams is held at this height. Both characters end their speech by mentioning descending from their position: Pertelote states that when they 'flee fro the bemes' (l. 2942) her husband should take the herbs she advised; whereas Chauntecleer considers that their 'perche' is too narrow (l. 3169). After Chauntecleer defies 'bothe sweven and drem' (l. 3171), they both fly from the 'beem' (l. 3172).<sup>9</sup> At this stage the narrating voice remains neutral whilst mentioning perches and beams, in contrast to later when Chauntecleer is trapped in the fox's jaws. Here conversely the voice interrupts the flow of narration breaking off at the point when Chauntecleer's throat is in Daun Russel's jaws, thus leaving the reader in suspense. Destiny is invoked and soon after Chauntecleer's flight 'fro the bemes' (l. 3339) is regretted.<sup>10</sup> The narration is interrupted for a good sixty-four lines, during which the readers are entertained by 'dame Pertelote' (l. 3362) depicted in high style, in mock-heroic mode as a classical wife, the other hens being compared to the Roman senators' wives, as well as by the exhilaration of the humans hunting the fox accompanied by the uproar of farm animals. The narration is finally resumed with the invitation, familiar to the oral narration, to listen further to 'how fortune turneth sodeynly' (l. 3403).

It appears that the movements, and the fortune of the two animals, the cock and the fox, complement each other on the rotating Wheel. Chauntecleer's fortune,

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the Prologue by the words of the Knight: 'And the contrarie is joye and greet solas, | As whan a man hath been in povre estaat, | And clymbeth up and wexeth fortunat, | And there abideth in prosperitee', (ll. 2774-77).

<sup>9</sup> 'Defien' in this context is defined as 'to defy the power of something', *MED*, 'defien', 2.b. See also Knight, *Ryming Craftily*, p. 226, on the ambiguous meaning of the verb.

<sup>10</sup> 'Allas, that chauntecleer fleigh fro the bemes', l. 3339.

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'aventure', commences with his flight down from the beams into the yard where the fox is ready to confront him with his flattery. The more Chauntecleer is deceived by falsehood the lower he is on his turning wheel. Whereas, when Daun Russell's fortune appears to be at the apex, having his prey in his jaws, it suddenly changes, as the narrator indicates. Notwithstanding his 'drede' (l. 3406), the prey finds the courage to address the fox. He follows Chauntecleer's advice, and in so doing he opens his mouth and loses his prey. Chauntecleer does not miss the opportunity to fly 'heighe upon a tree [...] anon' (l. 3417), recalling the movement upwards on Fortune's wheel. Thus, Chauntecleer attains his double bliss: when he 'fethered Pertelote' (l. 3177), and when having escaped from the fox's mouth he flies 'heighe upon a tree [...] anon' (l. 3417). And the Priest keeps his word, that he would 'be myrie' (l. 2817).<sup>11</sup>

### Chauntecleer's Rapture

The narrating voice accompanies the introduction of the fox plotting to enter the yard, comparing him to famous betrayers including Judas, Ganelon and Synon. Flattery is closely related to falsehood also when the narrator addresses the 'lordes'.<sup>12</sup>

Allas! ye lordes, many a fals flatour  
Is in youre courtes, and many a losengeour  
That plesen yow wel moore, by my feith,  
Than he that soothfastnesse unto yow seith. (ll. 3325-8)

Here, as in *HF*, the debate on dreams is accompanied by a discourse centred on the theme of falsehood. In this case the cock's dream was true, and represented the danger from a false flatterer. It could be argued that the protagonist once flown

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<sup>11</sup> This is consistent with the request from the Knight and the Host expressed in the Prologue of the tale.

<sup>12</sup> The trait of his falsity is underlined, repeated twice in a few lines. The very first adjective opening the enumeration of the fox's appellations is 'false mordroure' (l. 3226), followed soon after by 'false dissymulour' (l. 3228).

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down from the height of the beams, and the height of the bookish quotations into earthly matters might be at risk of tricks and deceits plotted by shrewd figures interested more in material matters than in learned disquisitions.

The yard where Chauntecleer roamed up and down with regal bearing, earlier compared to Eden (ll. 3257-8), is soon turned from paradise into bitter reality: Chauntecleer 'was ... ravysshed with his flaterie' (l. 3324). 'Ravysshed', as has been discussed (see pp. 40, 98), also pertains to mystical visions. Here in a more down-to-earth significance, it identifies the situation of losing one's wits, but in the sense of being unreasonable rather than being transported into another state of consciousness, and being granted higher knowledge. In effect the narrator plays with the several meanings of 'ravishen'.<sup>13</sup> Rather than being 'ravished' in order to achieve superior awareness, Chauntecleer is ravished by the falsity of the flattering fox. Reversing received expectations, ravishment here, then, is an act occurring during falsehood rather than being a guarantee of reliable revelation. Being 'ravished' in an earthly yard-garden may be fatally treacherous. As a consequence, Chauntecleer's ravishment, caused by the fox's words, is ironically an entirely earthly and deceptive phenomenon.

Chauntecleer was right in interpreting his dream as meaningful. Nonetheless, he applies neither his knowledge nor his dream interpretation to his everyday life, and his interpretation, though correct, does not help him avoid the danger. The moral teaches that vigilance is required. Or in other words, a fair combination of bookish knowledge of authority coupled with experience would allow the two attitudes to

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<sup>13</sup> It signifies 'to transport somebody into an ecstasy, a vision, contemplation'; 'ben ravished to (in-to) paradis (the thridde heven)' is the very expression employed to illustrate St Paul's rapture, *MED*, 'ravishen', 3. c. St Paul's II Corinthians, 12. 2-4. It also has the meaning of being 'dumbfound; be transported out of one's wits', *MED* 'ravishen', 4, a.

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complement each other, authority and experience, as Chauntecleer himself had remarked at the beginning of his speech.<sup>14</sup> As to the debate, dreams can be understood in retrospect: even though one is granted a vision of future events, only real life can contribute to decipher dreams.<sup>15</sup>

Once the tale is over, the return to fictional reality is performed gradually, similarly to the final epilogue in *TC*. The narrator's voice emerges once more, and he can finally address the listeners by 'ye that holden this tale a folye' (l. 3438). The unbelievers are directly addressed and all listeners are encouraged to take the 'fruyt' and leave the 'chaf'.<sup>16</sup> This choice is not made by the narrator. Discerning between the two is something that is left to the audience. As a further step back to the fictional reality, the narrator's invocation to God, who 'brynge us to his heighe blisse' (l. 3446), also reminds us that it is a priest's voice, and perhaps here he redirects to the true bliss.

In *CT* Chaucer manages to bring to artistic maturity other seminal ideas that stemmed from his early dream visions. The first issue regards the voice. The Eagle explores the theme of sound at large. In *HF* when the dreamer visits the House of Rumour, he perceives that every voice materialises itself in different individual shapes. In *CT* Chaucer finds the correspondence between the voices and the narrator-pilgrims. Each pilgrim is free to express his voice through a tale of his/her own choice. Whilst in *HF* the shapes remain unpersonified, in *CT* they acquire a definite personality and a place within the society of the time. The second issue also germinates in the early poems and blossoms in *CT*: authorial claims and story telling.

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<sup>14</sup> 'And han wel founden by experience | that dremes been significaciouns', ll. 2978-9.

<sup>15</sup> Interpretation of tales as well as dreams varies according to the interpreter-listener, as Chaucer shows in the Epilogue, where – to quote Knight's words – the 'Host's limited capacity has only grasped the vulgar bits', *Ryming Craftily*, p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> As in *TC*, also in *NPT* the narrator detaches himself from what is stated about women's advice when he makes clear that 'Thise been the cokkes wordes, and nat myne', l. 3265.

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In *HF* the dreamer-poet asserts that no one has ever narrated Aeneas's story as he does. One can be taken aback by such a statement: Virgil's *Aeneid* establishes Aeneas's story once and for all. Virgil is the Author and Aeneas – as historical fictional character – can only have one storyline. However, acknowledging the power of story-telling, Chaucer states that the one heard in *HF* is unique, in that it is his own. Similarly the Canterbury pilgrims offer their versions of the stories, and every version merits existence through narration. What appears to emerge is that there is no right or wrong in story-telling; and story-telling cannot have an end. This is a legacy of the oral tradition.<sup>17</sup> Every story is a voice and has a different shape depending on its teller. Thus the voice that acquired neutral shapes in *HF* in *CT* has become personified.

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<sup>17</sup> A researcher showed how an oral performer who had been followed for several years, had changed the version of his performance in the course of time. Although there were recordings that witnessed the differences within the performances, he still maintained that he was telling the same story. M. Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature*, Dublin, Portland, Four Courts Press, 2009, p. 9.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

At the end of the journey the pilgrims arrive at the sight of Canterbury that the Parson translates from the topographic Canterbury into a Heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the departure place – albeit the Tabard Inn is the meeting point of the lively folk – is the poet's bedchamber. The audience has the privilege to share as departure point the poet's bedchamber. The image of the cell, of 'chiuso loco' (see p. 173), the enclosed place where to attain the extra-ordinary poetic state of consciousness has a long history. As has been discussed above in chapter three, the Patristic writers, and poets have commented upon the dream attained in sleep in their cell. Whether it has been passed down or it by now has become part of the artists' unconscious, the image of the bedchamber at times re-emerges: Marcel Proust commences his *Recherche* there (1913); Virginia Woolf claims for a room for the women-writers-to-be – albeit physical – only a few years later (1929). The bedchamber is not only a creative space for writers: composer Eric Coates (1886-1957) disclosed the existence of a 'dark room' in his mind where he could turn on the music.<sup>2</sup>

It is a space fenced off from the ordinary consciousness where artists and mystics withdraw, wherein apparitions as appearances move and make their voices heard.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Knight remarks that heading to Canterbury on the pilgrims' road when the sun has the same inclination as on the day the pilgrims were in Harbledown, Canterbury Cathedral appears golden, as a 'topographicist epiphany', 'Places in the Text: A Topographicist Approach to Chaucer', in *Speaking Images: Essays in Honor of V. A. Kolve*, R. F. Yeager, C. C. Morse eds., Asheville, Pegasus Press, 2004, pp. 445-461, pp. 454-5.

<sup>2</sup> 'There is a small dark room somewhere in my head that only I myself am acquainted with. And once I open the door and close it gently behind me I can always be assured of being safe from interference. I go inside but instead of turning on the light, I turn on the music, and it rarely fails. So whenever an air raid warning sounded or three rings from the bell told me that enemy aircraft was heading this way, or the guns in Hyde Park set up their staccato racket I knew that the little dark room was waiting to receive me and give me its wealth of musical sounds, which in the sanctuary of its peaceful protection I was free to collect and commit to my manuscript paper', from the programme 'Tales from the Stave', Series 6, Episode two, broadcast on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2010, on Radio 4, 13.30-14.00.



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Figuratively the artist – like the mystic – is depicted within a space, visible through an opening arch, usually sustained by two pillars. In Hildegard's representation of her receiving a vision, she is between two columns forming an arch, whereas the monk can only introduce his ear into this space (see fig. 3). The partition between worlds is also materialised as a curtain (see figs. 5, 6). Virgil is portrayed whilst composing, beyond a veil-curtain between two trees, whose branches approach to form an arch (fig. 5). Christine de Pizan's arched enclosed space is peopled with the three *dames*, rigorously within the arching pillars (see fig. 4). Another illumination includes the beam of light striking Christine (fig. 7) similar to the beam characterising the Annunciations (fig. 6).

In *CT* Chaucer has overcome the explicit oneiric structure, in that the poet-dreamer is not overtly present. By now the audience can decipher that the poet has 'dremed' and that what they hear is the result of his withdrawal to his bedroom. The Spring season with the sweet April showers signposts the transition to a narratorial oneiric level, and it is only one of the elements defining the dream vision.<sup>3</sup> The Narrator-pilgrim-dreamer introduces his fellow travellers. Then each pilgrim opens up a mirror of their mind and lets the audience access their fictional world: unique albeit the story might be well known. The journey, the *viage*, from the single-layered development of the dream visions to the complexity of the *CT* is moving from the single-room space of a hall to a multi-storey, multi-room castle – to return to the architectural rhetorical imagery. Every pilgrim represents a door through which the audience enters a different vision – a different story telling. In *CT* readers can choose which door to

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<sup>3</sup> J. V. Cunningham demonstrated that *CT* present similar elements as dream visions, although the dream is not explicit, see 'The Literary Form of the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*', *Modern Philology*, 49 (1952), 172-81. See also C. B. Heatt, 'Un Autre Fourme: Guillaume de Machaut and the Dream Vision Form', *The Chaucer Review*, 14 (1979) 97-115, and J. Davidoff, *Beginning Well: Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry*, Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988.

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enter, without strictly following the path indicated by the Narrator. In this game of doors, of mirrors of the mind, of voices clothed with human semblances, do the *CT* constitute a labyrinth in which readers and scholars still debate while roaming, looking around 'astoned', in wonder, trying to map its territory?

At the end of the first two chapters, it was asked whether the literary 'drem' signifies the state of consciousness whereby the poets could attain poetic inspiration, and whether something is left of the ecstatic state of inspiration in medieval oneiric poetry. The answer to these questions could perhaps explain why Chaucer claims that his 'drems' are not interpretable by the most renowned dream-interpreters of Antiquity. Chaucer's 'drems' express his withdrawing into his bedchamber, which does not only represent his poetry as a metaphor. Further than that, it depicts through figurative imagery the transitional creative state of consciousness in which the poetic inspiration is achieved. Chaucer takes his audience by the hand within the first dream visions and accompanies the readers towards the miracle of the place-time when poetry springs. The audience, not being artists, requires that each stage is explicitly signposted: bedchamber, sleeplessness, dreams, apparitions, the final act of poetry, and awakening redirecting to the moment in time-space where it all commenced, thus completing a circular path. Once educated, the audience is finally capable of perceiving the Spring landscape signalling the poet's 'drem'. Moreover, Chaucer's works – be they explicit or implicit 'drems' – present an ascent towards knowledge, resembling the structure underpinning the mystics' writings. The poet-dreamer acquires knowledge, returns to ordinary reality to disseminate it, thus sharing with the mystics the figurative imagery that consists of archetypal symbols emerging in cultures throughout time and space, as discussed in chapter two.

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A final feature merits reflecting upon: the Retraction. Chaucer's retractions take on more than one form. The Retraction of *CT*, Troilus's laughter, and the non-conclusion of *HF*, proceeding *à rebours*, could be a type of retraction. Chaucer's fragmentation can mirror, even though not directly, the Pseudo-Dionysus's negative way, and his scepticism about words.<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, the materialisation of silence for a poet is a blank page, the lack of words, the absence of conclusion. The final silence represents the ineffable, the unutterable. It is these precise destabilising aspects that trigger for the readers a constant flow of words and theories within criticism. The journey commenced in the poet's bedchamber leads to Canterbury, transmuted into the Heavenly Jerusalem (*CT*, X, 51). Similarly the hero's journey into the netherworld only apparently heads outwards, but in fact it leads inwards: a process whereby the immense space of the Microcosm and Macrocosm can meet.

As already pointed out in the course of the previous chapters, 'drem' has been too often blended with 'dream' in the modern sense. The present research has identified and re-defined the wider and more complex significance of 'drem' within the cultural context of the fourteenth century and has illustrated how Chaucer's 'drem' fits and is embedded within it. In the initial chapter it has first been shown that – further to the dream classifications traditionally referred to by criticism – dream was one of the relevant stages within the gamut of transitional states leading to *revelatio* and *alienatio*. As stated by medieval theologians, it was employed in its symbolic sense to refer to revelatory ecstasy. As illustrated in the second chapter the ecstatic experience is often expressed in the mystics' words as similar to a dream, the dream being the human

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<sup>4</sup> See Boenig, *Chaucer and the Mystics*, Introduction, in particular pp. 11-22. To be noticed in passing that *meditatio* is defined as 'retractatio cogitationis', retraction or withdrawal of the 'thinking' by Hugh of St Victor, *De modo dicendi et meditandi*, PL 176, col 879, see ch. 1, p. 43, n. 219. T. H. Bestul relates *The Parson's Tale* to the medieval concept of 'meditation' as 'an example of organized thinking, or sustained thought along planned lines' as was conceived by Hugh of St Victor, Bestul T. H., 'Chaucer's Parson's Tale and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation', *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 600-619, pp. 615, 602 respectively.

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experience most similar to the one visionaries mention when they explain it to those who have never experienced that ecstatic state. The figurative images of dream within sleep, of the cell, and the bedchamber, their appropriation within literary works, the debate concerning the poets' role and their relation with truth and theology, the oneiric outset of numerous medieval poems, all this points to a close familiarity and similarity of employment of the oneiric phenomenon, which refers to an ecstatic state wherein the mystics could progress towards revelation and poets could attain creative process.

To sum up, the conclusions that can be drawn are twofold: linguistic and literary. From the linguistic point of view further to 'dream', Middle English 'drem' refers to an extra-ordinary state of consciousness, which occurs in waking and is employed by Chaucer to denote the transitional state of poetic creation pertaining to ecstatic phenomena. Thus, this research has shown that the term 'drem' was bestowed the dignity of a technical term defining a specific transitional state of awareness within the oneiric discourse, one which was related to the province of gnoseology. The research has proposed adding the significance of transitional state during which human consciousness becomes heightened and can achieve extra-ordinary awareness. This further significance of 'drem' is not opposed but rather juxtaposed to 'dream'.

The second conclusion follows from the first and entails consequences for the reading of all medieval dream visions. From the literary perspective, this richer, more complex significance of 'drem' has a relevant impact on the analysis of Chaucer's poems and can be extended to medieval dream visions. Reading Chaucer's works as 'drem' sheds new light on his process of poetic creation and his awareness of the transitional oneiric state in which this process takes place. Although Chaucer

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represents the dream-narrator in a physical bedchamber, as he does in *BD* for instance, 'drem' would not only point to the dreamer's dream but also to the poet's transitional creative state. Despite the physicality of a number of details, Chaucer's literary 'drem' presents aspects of the mystical experience, as illustrated throughout the second part of the research. The presence of figurative imagery also employed in mystics' writings confirms this reading of Chaucer's 'drem'. Furthermore, the poet's oneiric creative process is signposted throughout Chaucer's works from *BD* to *TC* and *CT*. In *BD* by means of the narrator suffering from lack of sleep Chaucer sets the foundations of the deeper significance of 'drem', which represents the watershed between a period deprived of poetic inspiration and the moment in which the poet commences to create. Journeys to the other world follow in *HF* and *PF* through which the dreamer attains further knowledge. The knowledge thus acquired is marked by means of images that, significantly, are the characteristic manner of expression of mystical writings. When considering Chaucer's 'drems' from this perspective, the analysis of his works would go beyond the interpretation of the dreams according to the medieval oneirocritical tradition, and rather entails a broader, extensive significance.

Finally one could wonder what transitional state Chaucer and medieval poets achieved. The answer lies not in this work, but could be found in a further study focussing on the multifaceted world of transitional states of consciousness with which medieval artists show familiarity: astonishment, 'stody', lethargy, *contemplatio*, 'ravyshment', a world that merits further exploration.



Fig. 3 - Hildegard receiving a vision, *Liber Scivias*, frontispiece, copy of the former Rupertsberg Codex, from *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, M. Fox comm., Santa Fe, Bear, 1985, p. 26



Fig. 4 - Christine and Reason begin to build the wall of the city, *Le Livre de la Cité des dames*, London, British Library, MS Harley, 4431, fol. 290, from Susan Groag Bell, 'Christine de Pizan in her study', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, Études christiniennes, 2008, mis en ligne le 10 juin 2008 <<http://crm.revues.org/index3212.html>> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2009]



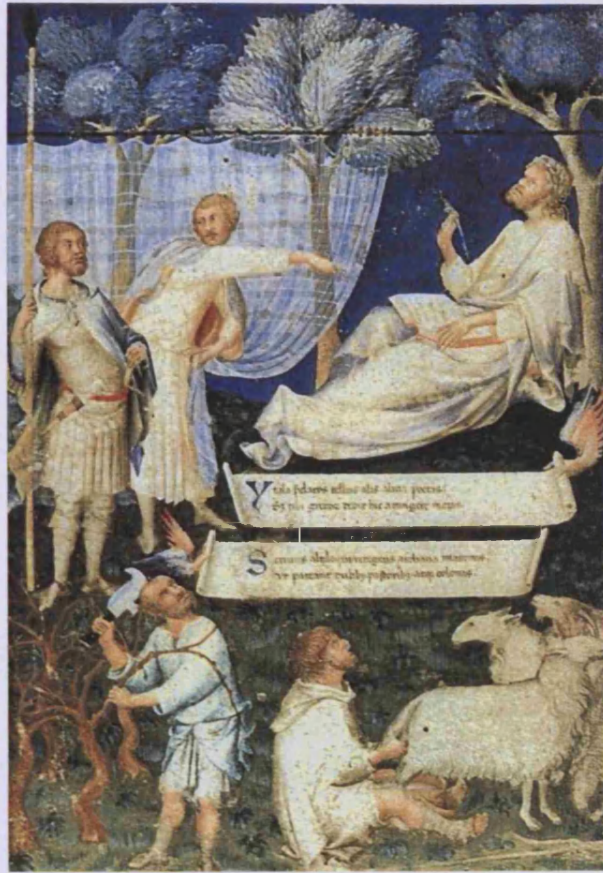


Fig. 5 - Simone Martini, *Allegoria Virgiliana*, from Virgilio, *Opere con commento di Servio*, Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS A 79, inf. fol. 1r, c. 1340 <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simone\\_Martini\\_-\\_frontespizio\\_per\\_codice\\_Virgilio\\_-\\_Biblioteca\\_Ambrosiana\\_Milano\\_.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simone_Martini_-_frontespizio_per_codice_Virgilio_-_Biblioteca_Ambrosiana_Milano_.jpg)> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011]



**Fig. 6** - The Annunciation at the beginning of Matins in the Hours of the Virgin, London, The British Library, MS Harley 2884, fol. 22v. <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=20714>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009]





Fig. 7 - Christine de Pizan in her study, *Le Livre de la Cité des dames*, Geneva, Bibliothèque de Genève, MS Fr. 180, fol. 5<sup>v</sup>, from Susan Groag Bell, 'Christine de Pizan in her study', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, Études christiniennes, 2008, mis en ligne le 10 juin 2008 <<http://crm.revues.org//index3212.html>> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2009]

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